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FRONTISPIECE.—see p. 25.
COPIED FROM "THE ONLY SURE GUIDE."

THE
DISTRICT SCHOOL
AS IT WAS.

BY
ONE WHO WENT TO IT.

Revised Edition.

BOSTON:
PHILLIPS, SAMPSON AND COMPANY,
110 WASHINGTON STREET.

1850.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following work was first published in Boston in 1833, and was received with unqualified favor. A second and larger edition was issued in New York with equal success. Several hundred of this edition were purchased by a distinguished friend of education, in a neighboring state, and distributed for the purpose of suggesting ideas of reform.

It was republished in London a few years ago, as giving a faithful description of one of the Institutions of New England.

Notwithstanding these evidences of the value of the book, and repeated calls for it from various sources ; several years have elapsed without a reprint. There ought to have been one before, for though much improvement has already been attained, the imperfections aimed at still linger in many places in our country.

The present publishers are happy now to make up the deficiency by a new edition revised by the Author, Rev. Warren Burton. It is hoped that it will be deemed particularly appropriate to School Libraries, and not unsuited to others ; that it will be sought as an agreeable gift book from Teachers to Pupils ; and lastly that it will ever be of historical use to rising generations, educated under better auspices, as exhibiting a true and graphic picture of "The District School as it Was."

PHILLIPS, SAMPSON & CO.,

Boston, Oct., 1850.

Publishers.

A W O R D

To the glancing Reader, if he will just stop a moment and see what it is.

This little volume was written in the hope that it would be a trifling aid to that improvement which is going on in respect to common schools. It was also intended to present a pleasant picture of some peculiarities which have prevailed in our country, but are now passing away.

It is trusted that no one who has kept* or is keeping a district school after the old fashion, will be offended at the slight degree of satire he will meet with here. Any one of due benevolence is willing to be laughed at, and even to join in the laugh against himself, if it will but hasten the tardy steps of improvement. Indeed, there are quite a number who have reason to believe that the author has here sketched some of his own school-keeping deficiencies.

It may be reasonably anticipated, that the young will be the most numerous readers of these pages. Some scenes have been described, the sports of the school-going season

* *Keep* school is a very different thing from *teach* school, according to Mr. Carter, in his *Essays on Popular Education*.

for instance, with a special view to their entertainment. It is trusted, however, that the older may not find it unpleasant to recall the pastimes of their early years.

Now and then a word has been used which some young readers may not understand. In this case they are entreated to seek a dictionary, and find out its meaning. They may be assured that the time spent in this way will not be lost. The definition thus acquired may be of use to them the very next book they shall take up, or at least in the course of the reading their future leisure will allow them to enjoy.

The Reader shall no longer be detained from the experience of a supposed school-boy ; if true to nature, no matter whether it really be, or be not, that of the

AUTHOR.

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THE DISTRICT SCHOOL AS IT WAS.

CHAPTER I.

THE OLD SCHOOL-HOUSE.

THE Old School-house, as it used to be called, how distinctly it rises to existence anew before the eye of my mind ! Here was kept the District School as it *was*. This was the seat of my rustic Alma Mater, to borrow a phrase from collegiate and classic use. It is now no more; and those of similar construction are passing away, never to be patterned again. It may be well, therefore, to describe the edifice wherein and whereabout occurred many of the scenes about to be recorded. I would have future generations acquainted

with the accommodations, or rather dis-accommodations, of their predecessors.

The Old School-house in District No. 5 stood on the top of a very high hill, on the north side of what was called the County road. The house of Capt. Clark, about ten rods off, was the only human dwelling within a quarter of a mile. The reason why this seminary of letters was perched so high in the air, and so far from the homes of those who resorted to it, was this:—Here was the centre of the district, as near as surveyor's chain could designate. The people east would not permit the building to be carried one rod further west, and those of the opposite quarter were as obstinate on their side. So here it was placed; and this continued to be literally the "hill of science" to generation after generation of learners for fifty years.

The edifice was set half in Capt. Clark's field, and half in the road. The wood-pile lay in the corner made by the east end and the stone wall. The best roof it ever had over it was the changeful sky, which was a

little too leaky to keep the fuel at all times fit for combustion, without a great deal of puffing and smoke. The door step was a broad unhewn rock, brought from the neighboring pasture. It had not a flat and even surface, but was considerably sloping from the door to the road; so that, in icy times, the scholars, in passing out, used to snatch from the scant declivity the transitory pleasure of a slide. But look out for a slip-up, ye careless; for many a time have I seen urchin's head where his feet were but a second before. And once the most lofty and perpendicular pedagogue I ever knew, became suddenly horizontalized in his egress.

But we have lingered round this door-step long enough. Before we cross it, however, let us just glance at the outer side of the structure. It was never painted by man; but the clouds of many years had stained it with their own dark hue. The nails were starting from their fastness, and fellow-clapboards were becoming less closely and warmly intimate. There were six windows, which here and there stopped and distorted

the passage of light by fractures, patches, and seams of putty. There were shutters of board, like those of a store, which were of no kind of use, excepting to keep the windows from harm in vacations, when they were the least liable to harm. They might have been convenient screens against the summer sun, were it not that their shade was inconvenient darkness. Some of these, from loss of buttons, were fastened back by poles, which were occasionally thrown down in the heedlessness of play, and not replaced till repeated slams had broken a pane of glass, or the patience of the teacher. To crown this description of externals, I must say a word about the roof. The shingles had been battered apart by a thousand rains; and, excepting where the most defective had been exchanged for new ones, they were dingy with the mold and moss of time. The bricks of the chimney-top were losing their cement, and looked as if some high wind might hurl them from their smoky vocation.

We will now go inside. First, there is

an entry which the district were sometimes provident enough to store with dry pine wood, as an antagonist to the greenness and wetness of the other fuel. A door on the left admits us to the school room. Here is a space about twenty feet long and ten wide, the reading and spelling parade. At the south end of it, at the left as you enter, was one seat and writing bench, making a right angle with the rest of the seats. This was occupied in the winter by two of the oldest males in the school. At the opposite end was the magisterial desk, raised upon a platform a foot from the floor. The fire-place was on the right, half-way between the door of entrance and another door leading into a dark closet, where the girls put their outside garments and their dinner baskets. This also served as a fearful dungeon for the immuring of offenders. Directly opposite the fire-place was an aisle, two feet and a half wide, running up an inclined floor to the opposite side of the room. On each side of this were five or six long seats and writing benches, for the accommodation of the

school at their studies. In front of these, next to the spelling floor, were low, narrow seats for abecedarians and others near that rank. In general, the older the scholar, the further from the front was his location. The windows behind the back seat were so low that the traveler could generally catch the stealthy glance of curiosity as he passed. Such was the Old School-house at the time I first entered it. Its subsequent condition and many other inconveniencies will be noticed hereafter.

CHAPTER II.

FIRST SUMMER AT SCHOOL—MARY SMITH.

I was three years and a half old when I first entered the Old School-house as an abecedarian. I ought, perhaps, to have set foot on the first step of learning's ladder before this; but I had no elder brother or sister to lead me to school, a mile off; and it never occurred to my good parents, that they could teach me even the alphabet; or, perhaps, they could not afford the time, or muster the patience for the tedious process. I had, however, learned the name of capital A, because it stood at the head of the column, and was the similitude of a harrow frame; of O, also, from its resemblance to a hoop. Its sonorous name, moreover, was a frequent passenger through my mouth, after I had begun to articulate; its ample sound being the most natural medium by which

man born unto trouble signifies the pains of his lot. X, too, was familiar, as it seemed so like the end of the old saw-horse that stood in the wood-shed. Further than this my alphabetical lore did not extend, according to present recollection.

I shall never forget my first day of scholarship, as it was the most important era which had yet occurred to my experience. Behold me on the eventful morning of the first Monday in June, arrayed in my new jacket and trowsers, into which my importance had been shoved for the first time in my life. This change in my costume had been deferred till this day, that I might be "all nice and clean to go to school." Then my Sunday hat (not of soft drab-colored fur, ye city urchins, but of coarse and hard sheep's wool)—my Sunday hat adorned my head for the first time in common week-day use; for my other had been crushed, torn, and soiled out of the seemliness, and almost out of the form, of a hat. My little new basket, too, bought expressly for the purpose, was laden with 'lection-cake and cheese for my

dinner, and slung upon my arm. An old Perry's spelling-book, that our boy Ben used at the winter school, completed my equipment.

Mary Smith was my first teacher, and the dearest to my heart I ever had. She was a niece of Mrs. Carter, who lived in the nearest house on the way to school. She had visited her aunt the winter before; and her uncle, being chosen committee for the school at the town-meeting in the spring, sent immediately to her home in Connecticut, and engaged her to teach the summer school. During the few days she spent at his house, she had shown herself peculiarly qualified to interest, and to gain the love of children. Some of the neighbors, too, who had dropped in while she was there, were much pleased with her appearance. She had taught one season in her native state; and that she succeeded well, Mr. Carter could not doubt. He preferred her, therefore, to hundreds near by; and for once the partiality of the relative proved profitable to the district.

Now Mary Smith was to board at her

uncle's. This was deemed a fortunate circumstance on my account, as she would take that care of me on the way which was needful to my inexperienced childhood. My mother led me to Mr. Carter's, to commit me to my guardian and instructor for the summer. I entertained the most extravagant ideas of the dignity of the school-keeping vocation, and it was with trembling reluctance that I drew near the presence of so lovely a creature as they told me Mary Smith was. But she so gently took my quivering little hand, and so tenderly stooped and kissed my cheek, and said such soothing and winning words, that my timidity was gone at once.

She used to lead me to school by the hand, while John and Sarah Carter gamboled on, unless I chose to gambol with them; but the first day, at least, I kept by her side. All her demeanor toward me, and indeed toward us all, was of a piece with her first introduction. She called me to her to read, not with a look and voice as if she were doing a duty she disliked, and was deter-

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mined I should do mine too, like it or not, as is often the manner of teachers; but with a cheerful smile and a softening eye, as if she were at a pastime, and wished me to partake of it.

My first business was to master the A B C, and no small achievement it was; for many a little learner waddles to school through the summer, and wallows to the same through the winter, before he accomplishes it, if he happens to be taught in the manner of former times. This might have been my lot, had it not been for Mary Smith. Few of the better methods of teaching, which now make the road to knowledge so much more easy and pleasant, had then found their way out of or into, the brain of the pedagogical vocation. Mary went on in the old way indeed; but the whole exercise was done with such sweetness on her part, that the dilatory and usually unpleasant task was to me a pleasure, and consumed not so much precious time as it generally does in the case of heads as stupid as mine. By the close of that summer, the alphabet

was securely my own. That hard, and to me unmeaning, string of sights and sounds were bound for ever to my memory by the ties created by gentle tones and looks.

That hardest of all tasks, sitting becomingly still, was rendered easier by her goodness. When I grew restless, and turned from side to side, and changed from posture to posture, in search of relief from my uncomfortableness, she spoke words of sympathy rather than reproof. Thus I was wont to be as quiet as I could. When I grew drowsy, and needed but a comfortable position to drop into sleep and forgetfulness of the weary hours, she would gently lay me at length on my seat, and leave me just falling to slumber, with her sweet smile the last thing beheld or remembered.

Thus wore away my first summer at the district school. As I look back on it, faintly traced on memory, it seems like a beautiful dream, the images of which are all softness and peace. I recollect, that, when the last day came, it was not one of light-hearted joy—it was one of sadness, and it closed in

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tears. I was now obliged to stay at home in solitude, for the want of playmates, and in weariness of the passing time, for the want of something to do; as there was no particular pleasure in saying A B C all alone, with no Mary Smith's voice and looks for an accompaniment.

## CHAPTER III.

## THE SPELLING-BOOK.

As the spelling-book was the first manual of instruction used in school, and kept in our hands for many years, I think it worthy of a separate chapter in these annals of the times that are past. The spelling-book used in our school from time immemorial—immemorial at least to the generation of learners to which I belonged—was thus entitled : “THE ONLY SURE GUIDE to the English Tongue, by William Perry, Lecturer of the English Language in the Academy of Edinburgh, and author of several valuable school-books.” What a magnificent title ! To what an enviable superiority had its author arrived ! ‘The *Only Sure Guide* ! Of course, the book must be as infallible as the catholic creed, and its author the very Pope of the jurisdiction of letters.

But the contents of the volume manifested

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most clearly the pontifical character of the illustrious man; for, from the beginning to the end thereof, faith and memory were all that was demanded of the novice. The understanding was no more called on than that of the devotee at his Latin mass-book. But let us enter on particulars. In the first place, there was a frontispiece. We little folks, however, did not then know that the great picture facing the title-page was so denominated. This frontispiece consisted of two parts. In the upper division, there was the representation of a tree laden with fruit of the largest description. It was intended, I presume, as a striking and alluring emblem of the general subject, the particular branches, and the rich fruits of education. But the figurative meaning was above my apprehension, and no one took the trouble to explain it. I supposed it nothing but the picture of a luxuriant apple-tree; and it always made me think of that good tree in my father's orchard, so dear to my palate,—the pumpkin sweeting.

There ran a ladder from the ground up

among the branches, which was designed to represent the ladder of learning; but of this I was ignorant. Little boys were ascending this in pursuit of the fruit that hung there so temptingly. Others were already up in the tree, plucking the apples directly from their stems; while others were on the ground, picking up those that had dropped in their ripeness. At the very top of the tree, with his head reared above all fruit or foliage, was a bare-headed lad with a book in his hand, which he seemed intently studying. I supposed that he was a boy that loved his book better than apples, as all good boys should,—one who in very childhood had trodden temptation under foot. But, indeed, it was only a boy who was gathering fruit from the topmost boughs, according to the figurative meaning, as the others were from those lower down. Or rather, as he was portrayed, he seemed like one who had culled the fairest and highest growing apples, and was trying to learn from a book where he should find a fresh and loftier tree upon which he might climb to a richer repast and a nobler distinction.

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This picture used to retain my eye longer than any other in the book. It was probably more agreeable on account of the other part of the frontispiece below it. This was the representation of a school at their studies, with the master at his desk. He was pictured as an elderly man, with an immense wig enveloping his head and bagging about his neck, and with a face that had a sort of half-way look, or rather perhaps a compound look, made up of an expression of perplexity at a sentence in parsing, or a sum in arithmetic, and a frown at the playful urchins in the distant seats. There could not have been a more capital device by which the pleasures of a free range and delicious eating, both so dear to the young, might be contrasted with stupefying confinement and longing palates in the presence of crabbed authority. Indeed, the first thing the Only Sure Guide said to its pupil was, "Play truant and be happy;" and most of the subsequent contents were not of a character to make the child forget this preliminary advice. These contents I was going

on to describe in detail; but on second thought I forbear, for fear that the description might be as tedious to my readers as the study of them was to me. Suffice it to say, there was talk about vowels and consonants, diphthongs and triphthongs, monosyllables and polysyllables, orthography and punctuation, and even about geography, all which was about as intelligible to us, who were obliged to commit it to memory year after year, as the fee-faw-fum uttered by the giant in one of our story-books.

Perry's spelling-book, as it was in those days, at least, is now out of use. It is nowhere to be found except in fragments in some dark corner of a country cupboard or garret. All vestiges of it will soon disappear for ever. What will the rising generations do, into what wilds of barbarism will they wander, into what pits of ignorance fall, without the aid of the Only Sure Guide to the English tongue?

## CHAPTER IV.

## FIRST WINTER AT SCHOOL.

How I longed for the winter school to begin, to which I looked forward as a relief from my do-nothing days, and as a renewal, in part at least, of the soft and glowing pleasures of the past summer! But the schoolmaster, the thought of him was a fearful looking-for of frowns and ferulings. Had I not heard our Ben tell of the direful punishments of the winter school; of the tingling hand, black and blue with twenty strokes, and not to be closed for a fortnight from soreness? Did not the minister and the schoolmaster of the preceding winter visit together at our house, one evening, and did I not think the schoolmaster far the more awful man of the two? The minister took me in his lap, gave me a kiss, and told me about his own little Charley at home, whom I must come and see; and he set me

down with the impression that he was not half so terrible as I had thought him. But the schoolmaster condescended to no words with me. He was as stiff and unstooping as the long kitchen fire-shovel, and as solemn of face as a cloudy fast-day. A trifling incident happened which increased my dread, and darkened my remembrance of him by another shade. I had silyly crept to the table on which stood the hats of our visitors, and in childish curiosity had first got hold of a glove, then a letter, which reposed in the crown of the magisterial head-covering. The owner's eye suddenly caught me at the mischief, and he gave me a look and a shake of his upper extremity, so full of "Let it alone or I will flog you" in their meaning, that I was struck motionless for an hour with fright, and had hard work to dam up, with all the strength of my quivering lips, a choking baby cry. Thenceforth, schoolmasters to my timid heart were of all men the most to be dreaded.

The winter at length came, and the first day of the school was fixed and made

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known, and the longed-for morning finally arrived. With hoping yet fearing heart, I was led by Ben to school. But my fears respecting the teacher were not realized that winter. He had nothing particularly remarkable about him to my little mind. He had his hands too full of the great things of the great scholars to take much notice of me, excepting to hear me read my Abs four times a day. This exercise he went through like a great machine, and I like a little one; so monotonous was the humdrum and regular the recurrence of *ab, eb, ib, ob, ub, &c.*, from day to day, and week to week. To recur to the metaphor of a ladder by which progress in learning is so often illustrated, I was all summer on the lowest round, as it were, lifting first one foot and then the other, still putting it down in the same place, without going any higher; and all winter, while at school, I was as wearily tap-tapping it on the second step, with the additional drawback of not having Mary Smith's sweet manners to win me up to the stand, help me cheerfully through the task, and set me

down again, pleased with her if with nothing else.

There was one circumstance, however, in the daily routine, which was a matter of some little excitement and pleasure. I was put into a class. Truly my littleness, feelingly, if not actually and visibly, enlarged itself, when I was called out with Sam Allen, Henry Green, and Susan Clark, to take our stand on the floor as the sixth class. I marched up with the tread of a soldier; and, thinks I, "Who has a better right to be at the head than myself?" so the head I took, as stiff and as straight as a cob. My voice, too, if it lost none of its treble, was pitched a key louder, as *a—b ab* rang through the realm. And when we had finished, I looked up among the large scholars, as I strutted to my seat, with the thought, "I am almost as big as you now," puffing out my tiny soul. Now, moreover, I held the book in my own hand, and kept the place with my own finger, instead of standing like a very little boy, with my hands at my side, following with my eye the point of the mistress' scissors:

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There was one terror at this winter school which I must not omit in this chronicle of my childhood. It arose from the circumstance of meeting so many faces which I had never seen before, or at least had never seen crowded together in one body. All the great boys and girls, who had been kept at home during the summer, now left axes and shovels, needles and spinning-wheels, and poured into the winter school. There they sat side by side, head after head, row above row. For this I did not care; but every time the master spoke to me for any little misdemeanor, it seemed as if all turned their eyes on my timid self, and I felt petrified by the gaze. But this simultaneous and concentrated eye-shot was the most distressing when I happened late, and was obliged to go in after the school were all seated in front of my advance. Those forty—I should say eighty eyes (for most of them had two apiece,) glancing up from their books as I opened the door, were as much of a terror to me as so many deadly gun-muzzles would be to a raw military

recruit. I tottered into the room and toward my seat with a palsyng dismay, as if every one was aiming an eye for my destruction.

The severest duty I was ever called to perform was sitting on that little front seat, at my first winter school. My lesson in the Abs conveyed no ideas, excited no interest, and, of course, occupied but very little of my time. There was nothing before me on which to lean my head, or lay my arms, but my own knees. I could not lie down to drowse as in summer, for want of room on the crowded seat. How my limbs ached for the freedom and activity of play! It sometimes seemed as if a drubbing from the master, or a kick across the school-house, would have been a pleasant relief.

But these bonds upon my limbs were not all. I had trials by fire in addition. Every cold forenoon, the old fire-place, wide and deep, was kept a roaring furnace of flame, for the benefit of blue noses, chattering jaws, and aching toes, in the more distant regions. The end of my seat, just opposite the chimney, was oozy with melted pitch, and some-

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times almost smoked with combustion. Judge, then, of what living flesh had to bear. It was a toil to exist. I truly ate the bread of instruction, or rather nibbled at the crust of it, in the sweat of my face.

But the pleasures and the pains of this season at school did not continue long. After a few weeks, the storms and drifts of midwinter kept me mostly at home. Henry Allen was in the same predicament. As for Susan Clark, she did not go at all after the first three or four days. In consequence of the sudden change from roasting within doors to freezing without, she took a violent cold, and was sick all winter.

## CHAPTER V.

## SECOND SUMMER—MARY SMITH AGAIN.

THE next summer, Mary Smith was the mistress again. She gave such admirable satisfaction, that there was but one unanimous wish that she should be re-engaged. Unanimous, I said, but it was not quite so; for Capt. Clark, who lived close by the school-house, preferred somebody else, no matter whom, fit or not fit, who should board with him, as the teachers usually did. But Mary would board with her aunt Carter, as before. Then Mr. Patch's family grumbled not a little, and tried to find fault; for they wanted their Polly should keep the school and board at home, and help her mother night and morning, and save the pay for the board to boot. Otherwise Polly must go into a distant district, to less advantage to the family purse. Mrs. Patch was

heard to guess that "Polly could keep as good a school as any body else. Her education had cost enough any how. She had been to our school summer after summer, and winter after winter, ever since she was a little gal, and had then been to the 'cademy three months besides. She had moreover taught three summers already, and was twenty-one; whereas Mary Smith had taught but two, and was only nineteen." But the committee had not such confidence in the experienced Polly's qualifications. All who had been to school with her knew that her head was dough, if ever head was. And all who had observed her school-keeping career (she never kept but once in the same place) pretty soon came to the same conclusion, notwithstanding her loaf of brains had been three months in that intellectual oven called by her mother the 'cademy.

So Mary Smith kept the school, and I had another delightful summer under her care and instruction. I was four years and a half old now, and had grown an inch. I

was no tiny, whining, half-scared baby, as in the first summer. No, indeed; I had been to the winter school, had read in a class, and had stood up at the fire with the great boys, had seen a snow-ball fight, and had been accidentally hit once by the icy missile of big-fisted Joe Swagger.

I looked down upon two or three fresh, slobbering abecedarians with a pride of superiority, greater perhaps than I ever felt again. We read not in *ab*, *eb*, &c., but in words that meant something; and, before the close of the summer, in what were called the "Reading Lessons," that is, little words arranged in little sentences.

Mary was the same sweet angel this season as the last. I did not, of course, need her soothing and smiling assiduity as before; but still she was a mother to me in tenderness. She was forced to caution us younglings pretty often; yet it was done with such sweetness, that a caution from her was as effectual as would be a frown, and indeed a blow, from many others. At least, so it was with me. She used to resort to vari-

ous severities with the refractory and idle, and in one instance she used the ferule; but we all knew, and the culprit knew, that it was well deserved.

At the close of the school, there was a deeper sadness in our hearts than on the last summer's closing day. She had told us that she should never be our teacher again,—should probably never meet many of us again in this world. She gave us much parting advice about loving and obeying God, and loving and doing good to every body. She shed tears as she talked to us, and that made our own flow still more. When we were dismissed, the customary and giddy laugh was not heard. Many were sobbing with grief, and even the least sensitive were softened and subdued to an unusual quietness.

The last time I ever saw Mary was Sunday evening, on my way home from meeting. As we passed Mr. Carter's; she came out to the chaise where I sat between my parents, to bid us good-bye. Oh, that last kiss, that last smile, and those last tones!

Never shall I forget them, so long as I have power to remember, or capacity to love. The next morning she left for her native town; and, before another summer, she was married. As Mr. Carter soon moved from our neighborhood, the dear instructress never visited it again.

## CHAPTER VI.

THIRD SUMMER—MEHITABEL HOLT AND OTHER  
INSTRUCTRESSES.

THIS summer, a person named Mehitabel Holt was our teacher. It was with eager delight that I set out for school on the first morning. The dull months that intervened between the winter school and the summer had seemed longer than ever. I longed for the companionship and the sports of school. I had heard nothing about the mistress, excepting that she was an experienced and approved one. On my way, the image of something like Mary Smith arose to my imagination; a young lady with pleasant face and voice, and a winning gentleness of manner. This was natural; for Mary was the only mistress I had ever been to, and in fact the only one I had ever seen, who made any impression on my mind in her school-

keeping capacity. What, then, was my surprise when my eyes first fell on Mehitabel Holt! I shall not describe how nature had made her, or time had altered her. Engaging manners and loveliness of character do not depend on the freshness of youth, fineness of complexion, or symmetry of form. She was not lovely; her first appearance indicated this; for the disposition will generally speak through the face. Subsequent experience proved Mehitabel to differ from the dear Mary as much as all that is sour does from the quintessence of sweetness. She had been well-looking, indeed rather beautiful once, I have heard; but, if so, the acidity of her temper had diffused itself through, and lamentably corroded this valued gift of nature.

She kept order; for her punishments were horrible, especially to us little ones. She dungeoned us in that windowless closet just for a whisper. She tied us to her chair post for an hour, because sportive nature tempted our fingers and toes into something like play. If we were restless on our seats,

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wearied of our posture, fretted by the heat, or sick of the unintelligible lesson, a twist of the ear, or a snap on the head from her thimbled finger, reminded us that sitting perfectly still was the most important virtue of a little boy in school. Our forenoon and afternoon recess was allowed to be five minutes only; and, even during that time, our voices must not rise above the tone of quiet conversation. That delightful exercise of juvenile lungs, hallooing, was a capital crime. Our noonings, in which we used formerly to rejoice in the utmost freedom of legs and lungs, were now like the noonings of the Sabbath, in the restraints imposed upon us. As Mehitabel boarded at Captain Clark's, any ranging in the fields, or raising of the voice, was easily detected by her watchful senses.

As the prevalent idea in those days respecting a good school was, that there should be no more sound and motion than was absolutely necessary, Mehitabel was, on the whole, popular with the parents. She kept us still, and forced us to get our lessons;

and that was something uncommon in a mistress. So she was employed the next summer to keep our childhood in bondage. Had her strict rules been enforced by any thing resembling Mary Smith's sweet and sympathetic disposition and manners, they would have been endurable. But, as it was, our schooling those two summers was a pain to the body, a weariness to the mind, and a disgust to the heart.

I shall not devote a separate chapter to all my summer teachers. What more I may have to say of them I shall put into this. They were none of them like Mehitabel in severity, nor all of them equal to her in usefulness, and none of them equal in any respect to Mary Smith. Some were very young, scarcely sixteen, and as unfit to manage that "harp of thousand strings," the human mind, as is the unskilled and changeful wind to manage any musical instrument by which science and taste delights the ear. Some kept tolerable order; others made the attempt, but did not succeed; others did not even make the attempt.

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All would doubtless have done better, had they been properly educated and disciplined themselves.

After I was ten years old, I ceased to attend the summer school except in foul weather, as in fair I was wanted at home on the farm. These scattering days, I and others of nearly the same age were sent to school by our parents, in hopes that we should get at least a snatch of knowledge. But this rainy day schooling was nothing but vanity to us, and vexation of spirit to the mistress. We could read and spell better than the younger and regular scholars, and were puffed up with our own superiority. We showed our contempt for the mistress and her orders, by doing mischief ourselves, and leading others into temptation.

If she had the boldness to apply the ferule, we laughed in her face, unless her blows were laid on with something like masculine strength. In case of such severity, we waited for our revenge till the close of the school for the day, when we took the liber-

ty to let saucy words reach her ear, especially if the next day was likely to be fair, and we of course were not to re-appear in her realm till foul weather again.

## CHAPTER VII.

LITTLE BOOKS PRESENTED THE LAST DAY OF  
THE SCHOOL.

THERE was one circumstance, connected with the history of summer schools of so great importance to little folks that it must not be omitted. It was this. 'The mistress felt obliged to give little books to all her pupils on the closing day of her school. Otherwise she would be thought stingy, and half the good she had done during the summer would be canceled by the omission of the expected donations. If she had the least generosity, or hoped to be remembered with any respect and affection, she must devote a week's wages, and perhaps more, to the purchase of these little toy-books. My first present, of course, was from Mary Smith. It was not a little book the first summer, but it was something that pleased me more.

The last day of the school had arrived. All, as I have somewhere said before, were sad that it was now to finish. My only solace was that I should now have a little book, for I was not unmoved in the general expectation that prevailed. After the reading and spelling, and all the usual exercises of the school, were over, Mary took from her desk a pile of the glittering little things we were looking for. What beautiful covers,—red, yellow, blue, green! Oh! not the first buds of spring, not the first rose of summer, not the rising moon, nor gorgeous rainbow, seemed so charming as that first pile of books now spread out on her lap, as she sat in her chair in front of the school. All eyes were now centered on the outspread treasures. Admiration and expectation were depicted on every face. Pleasure glowed in every heart; for the worst, as well as the best, calculated with certainty on a present. What a beautifier of the countenance agreeable emotions are! The most ugly visaged were beautiful now with the radiance of keen anticipation. The

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scholars were called out one by one to receive the dazzling gifts, beginning at the oldest. I, being an abecedarian, must wait till the last; but as I knew that my turn would surely come in due order, I was tolerably patient. But what was my disappointment, my exceeding bitterness of grief, when the last book on Mary's lap was given away, and my name not yet called! Every one present had received, except myself and two others of the A B C rank. I felt the tears starting to my eyes; my lips were drawn to their closest pucker to hold in my emotions from audible outcry. I heard my fellow-sufferer at my side draw long and heavy breaths, the usual preliminaries to the bursting-out of grief. This feeling, however, was but momentary; for Mary immediately said, "Charles and Henry and Susan, you may now all come to me together:" at the same time her hand was put into her work-bag. We were at her side in an instant, and in that time she held in her hand—what? Not three little picture-books, but what was to us a surprising nov-

elty, viz., three little birds wrought from sugar by the confectioner's art. I had never seen or heard or dreamed of such a thing. What a revulsion of delighted feeling now swelled my little bosom ! "If I should give you books," said Mary, "you could not read them at present ; so I have got for you what you will like better perhaps, and there will be time enough for you to have books when you shall be able to read them. So, take these little birds, and see how long you can keep them." We were perfectly satisfied, and even felt ourselves distinguished above the rest. My bird was more to me than all the songsters in the air, although it could not fly or sing, or open its mouth. I kept it for years, until by accident it was crushed to pieces, and was no longer a bird.

But Susan Clark—I was provoked at her. Her bird was nothing to her but a piece of pepperminted sugar, and not a keepsake from Mary Smith. She had not left the school-house before she had nibbled off its bill. But her mother was always tickling

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her palate with sugar-plums, raisins, cookies, and such like, which the rest of us were not accustomed to; and she had no idea that the sweet little sugar bird was made, at least was given, for the sake of her heart rather than her palate.

The next summer, my present was the "Death and Burial of Cock Robin." This was from the dearly loved Mary too. I could then do something more than look at the pictures. I could read the tragic history which was told in verse below the pictured representations of the mournful drama. How I used to gaze and wonder at what I saw in that little book! Could it be that all this really took place; that the sparrow really did do the murderous deed with his bow and his arrow? I never knew before that birds had such things. Then there was the fish with his dish, the rook with his book, the owl with his shovel, &c. Yet, if it were not all true, why should it be so pictured and related in the book? I had the impression that every thing that was printed in a book was surely true; and

as no one thought to explain to me the nature of a fable, I went on puzzled and wondering till progressive reason at length divined its meaning. But Cock Robin, with its red cover and gilded edges—I have it now. It is the first little book I ever received, and it was from Mary Smith; and, as it is the only tangible memento of her goodness that I possess, I shall keep it as long as I can.

I had a similar present each successive season, so long as I regularly attended the summer school. What marvels did they contain! How curiosity and wonder feasted on their contents! They were mostly about giants, fairies, witches, and ghosts. By this kind of reading, superstition was trained up to a monstrous growth; and, as courage could not thrive in its cold and gloomy shadow, it was a sickly shoot for years. Giants, fairies, witches, and ghosts were ready to pounce upon me from every dark corner in the day-time and from all around in the night, if I happened to be alone. I trembled to go to bed alone for

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years; and I was often almost paralyzed with horror when I chanced to wake in the stillness of midnight, and my ever-busy fancy presented the grim and grinning images with which I supposed darkness to be peopled.

I wish I had all those little books now. I would keep them as long as I live, and at death would bequeath them to a national Lyceum, or some other institution, to be kept as a schoolmaster keeps a pupil's first writing, as a specimen or a mark to show what improvement has been made. Indeed, if improvement has been made in any thing, it has been in respect to children's books. When I compare the world of fact in which the "Little Philosophers" of the present day live, observe, and enjoy, with the visionary regions where I wandered, wondered, believed, and trembled, I almost wish to be a child again, to know the pleasure of having earliest curiosity fed with fact, instead of fiction and folly, and to know so much about the great world with so young a mind.

## CHAPTER VIII.

GRAMMAR—YOUNG LADY'S ACCIDENCE—MURRAY  
—PARSING—POPE'S ESSAY.

ON my fifth summer, at the age of seven and a half, I commenced the study of grammar. The book generally used in our school by beginners, was called the Young Lady's Accidence. I had the honor of a new one. The Young Lady's Accidence! How often have I gazed on that last word, and wondered what it meant! Even now, I cannot define it, though, of course, I have a guess at its meaning. Let me turn this very minute to that oracle of definitions, the venerable Webster: "A small book containing the rudiments of grammar." That is it, then. But what an intelligible and appropriate term for a little child's book! The mysterious title, however, was most appropriate to the contents of the volume;

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for they were all mysterious, and that for years, to my poor understanding.

Well, my first lesson was to get the Parts of Speech, as they are called. What a grand achievement to engrave on my memory these ten separate and strange words! With what ardor I took my lesson from the mistress, and trudged to my seat! It was a new study, and it was the first day of the school moreover, before the bashfulness occasioned by a strange teacher had subsided, and before the spirit of play had been excited. So there was nothing at the moment to divert me from the lofty enterprise.

Reader, let your mind's eye peep into that old school-house. See that little boy in the second high seat from the front, in home-made and home-dyed pea-green* cotton jacket and trowsers, with a clean Monday morning collar turned out from his neck. His new book is before him on the bench, kept open by his left hand. His right supports his head on its palm, with

* This was the name given by the housewives to the color.

the corresponding elbow pressed on the bench. His lips move, but at first very slowly. He goes over the whole lesson in a low whisper. He now looks off his book, and pronounces two or three of the first,—article, noun, pronoun; then just glances at the page, and goes on with two or three more. He at length repeats several words without looking. Finally, he goes through the long catalogue, with his eye fastened on vacancy. At length, how his lips flutter, and you hear the parts of speech whizzing from his tongue like feathered arrows! A good simile that. Parts of speech—they are indeed arrows of thought, though as yet armed with no point, and shot at no mark.

There, the rigmarole is accomplished. He starts up, and is at the mistress' side in a moment. "Will you hear my lesson, ma'am?" As she takes the book, he looks directly in her face, and repeats the aforementioned words loudly and distinctly, as if there were no fear of failure. He has got as far as the adverb; but now he hesitates, his eye drops, his lips are open ready for

utterance, but the word does not come. He shuts them, he presses them hard together, he puts his finger to them, and there is a painful hiatus in his recitation, a disconnection, an *anti* to the very word he is after. "Conjunction," says the mistress. The little hand leaves the lips, at the same time that an involuntary "Oh!" bursts out from them. He lifts his head and his eye, and repeats with spirit the delinquent word, and goes on without hesitation to the end of the lesson. "Very well," says the teacher, or the hearer of the school; for she rather listened to than instructed her pupils. "Get so far for the next lesson." The child bows, whirls on his heel, and trips to his seat, mightily satisfied excepting with that one failure of memory, when that thundering word, *conjunction*, refused to come at his will. But that word he never forgot again. The failure fastened it in his memory for ever. This pea-green boy was myself, the present historian of the scene.

My next lesson lagged a little; my third seemed quite dull; my fourth I was two

days in getting. At the end of the week, I thought that I could get along through the world very well without grammar, as my grandfather had done before me. But my mistress did not agree with me, and I was forced to go on. I contrived, however, to make easy work of the study. I got frequent, but very short lessons, only a single sentence at a time. This was easily committed to memory, and would stay on till I could run up and toss it off in recitation, after which it did not trouble me more. The recollection of it puts me in mind of a little boy lugging in wood, a stick at a time. My teacher was so ignorant of the philosophy of mind, that she did not know that this was not as good a way as any; and, indeed, she praised me for my smartness. The consequence was, that, after I had been through the book, I could scarcely have repeated ten lines of it, excepting the very first and the very last lessons. Had it been ideas instead of words that had thus escaped from my mind, the case would have been different. As it was, the only matter of

regret was, that I had been forming a bad habit, and had imbibed an erroneous notion, to wit, that lessons were to be learned simply to be recited.

The next winter this Accidence was committed, not to memory, but to oblivion ; for, on presenting it to the master the first day of the school, he told me it was old-fashioned and out of date, and I must have Murray's Abridgment. So Murray was purchased, and I commenced the study of grammar again, excited by the novelty of a new and clean and larger book. But this soon became even more dull and dry than its predecessor ; for it was more than twice the size, and the end of it was at the most discouraging distance of months, if not of years. I got only half way through the verb this winter. The next summer I began the book again, and arrived at the end of the account of the parts of speech. The winter after, I went over the same ground again, and got through the rules of syntax, and felt that I had accomplished a great work. The next summer I reviewed the

whole grammar ; for the mistress thought it necessary to have " its most practical and important parts firmly fixed in the memory, before attempting the higher exercises of the study." On the third winter, I began to apply my supposed knowledge in the process of *passing*, as it was termed by the master. The very pronunciation of this word shows how little the teacher exercised the power of independent thought. He had been accustomed to hear parse called *pass* ; and, though the least reflection would have told him it was not correct, that reflection came not, and for years the grammarians of our district school *passed*. However, it was rightly so called. It *was* passing, as said exercise was performed ; passing over, by, around, away, from the science of grammar, without coming near it, or at least without entering into it with much understanding of its nature. Mode, tense, case, government and agreement, were ever flying from our tongues, to be sure ; but their meaning was as much a mystery as the hocus pocus of a juggler.

At first we parsed in simple prose, but soon entered on poetry. Poetry—a thing which to our apprehension differed from prose in this only, that each line began with a capital letter, and ended usually with a word sounding like another word at the end of the adjoining line. But, unskilled as we all generally were in the art of parsing, some of us came to think ourselves wonderfully acute and dexterous nevertheless. When we perceived the master himself to be in doubt and perplexity, then we felt ourselves on a level with him, and ventured to oppose our *guess* to his. And if he appeared a dunce extraordinary, as was sometimes the case, we used to put ourselves into the *potential* mood pretty often, as we knew that our teacher could never assume the *imperative* on this subject.

The fact is, neither we nor the teacher entered into the writer's meaning. The general plan of the work was not surveyed, nor the particular sense of separate passages examined. We could not do it, per-

haps, from the want of maturity of mind ; the teacher did not, because he had never been accustomed to any thing of the kind in his own education ; and it never occurred to him that he could deviate from the track, or improve upon the methods of those who taught him. Pope's Essay on Man was the parsing manual used by the most advanced. No wonder, then, that pupil and pedagogue so often got bewildered and lost in a world of thought like this ; for, however well ordered a creation it might be, it was scarcely better than a chaos to them.

In closing, I ought to remark, that all our teachers were not thus ignorant of grammar, although they did not perhaps take the best way to teach it. In speaking thus of this department of study, and also of others, I have reference to the more general character of schoolmasters and schools.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PARTICULAR MASTER—VARIOUS METHODS OF PUNISHMENT.

I have given some account of my first winter at school. Of my second, third, and fourth, I have nothing of importance to say. The routine was the same in each. The teachers were remarkable for nothing in particular: if they were, I have too indistinct a remembrance of their characters to portray them now; so I will pass them by, and describe the teacher of my fifth.

He was called the *particular* master. The scholars, in speaking of him, would say, "He is so particular." The first morning of the school, he read us a long list of regulations to be observed in school, and out. "There are more rules than you could shake a stick at before your arm would ache," said some one. "And if the master

should shake a stick at every one who should disobey them, he would not find time to do much else," said another. Indeed, it proved to be so. Half the time was spent in calling up scholars for little misdemeanors, trying to make them confess their faults, and promise stricter obedience, or in devising punishments and inflicting them. Almost every method was tried that was ever suggested to the brain of pedagogue. Some were feruled on the hand; some were whipped with a rod on the back; some were compelled to hold out, at arm's length, the largest book which could be found, or a great leaden inkstand, till muscle and nerve, bone and marrow, were tortured with the continued exertion. If the arm bent or inclined from the horizontal level, it was forced back again by a knock of the ruler on the elbow. I well recollect that one poor fellow forgot his suffering by fainting quite away. This lingering punishment was more befitting the vengeance of a savage, than the corrective efforts of a teacher of the young in civilized life.

He had recourse to another method, almost, perhaps quite, as barbarous. It was standing in a stooping posture, with the finger on the head of a nail in the floor. It was a position not particularly favorable to health of body or soundness of mind; the head being brought about as low as the knees, the blood rushing to it, and pressing unnaturally on the veins, often caused a dull pain, and a staggering dizziness. That man's judgment or mercy must have been topsy-turvy also, who first set the example of such an infliction on those whose progress in knowledge depended somewhat on their being kept right end upward.

The above punishments were sometimes rendered doubly painful by their taking place directly in front of the enormous fire, so that the pitiable culprit was roasted as well as racked. Another mode of punishment—an anti-whispering process—was setting the jaws at a painful distance apart, by inserting a chip perpendicularly between the teeth. Then we occasionally had our hair pulled, our noses tweaked, our ears

pinched and boxed, or snapped, perhaps, with India-rubber; this last the perfection of ear-tingling operations. There were minor penalties, moreover, for minor faults. The uneasy urchins were clapped into the closet, thrust under the desk, or perched on its top. Boys were made to sit in the girls' seats, amusing the school with their grinning awkwardness; and girls were obliged to sit on the masculine side of the aisle, with crimsoned necks, and faces buried in their aprons.

But I have dwelt long enough on the various penalties of the numerous violations of Master Particular's many orders. After all, he did not keep an orderly school. The cause of the mischief was, he was variable. He wanted that persevering firmness and uniformity which alone can insure success. He had so many regulations, that he could not stop at all times to notice the transgressions of them. The scholars, not knowing with certainty what to expect, dared to run the risk of disobedience. The consequence of this procedure on the part of the ruler

and the ruled was, that the school became uncommonly riotous before the close of the season. The larger scholars soon broke over all restraint; but the little ones were narrowly watched and restricted somewhat longer. But these gradually grew unmindful of the unstable authority, and finally contemned it with almost insolent effrontery, unless the master's temper-kindled eye was fixed directly and menacingly upon them. Thus the many regulations were like so many cobwebs, through which the great flies would break at once, and so tear and disorder the net that it would not hold even the little ones, or at all answer the purpose for which it was spun.

I would not have it understood that this master was singular in his punishments; for such methods of correcting offenders have been in use time out of mind. He was distinguished only for resorting to them more frequently than any other instructor within my own observation. The truth is, that it seemed to be the prevailing opinion both among teachers and parents, that boys

and girls *would* play and be mischievous at any rate, and that consequently masters *must* punish in some way or other. It was a matter of course ; nothing better was expected.

CHAPTER X.

HOW THEY USED TO READ IN THE OLD SCHOOL-
HOUSE IN DISTRICT NO. V.

IN this description of the District School, as it *was*, that frequent and important exercise, Reading, must not be omitted,—Reading as it *was*. Advance, then, ye readers of the Old School-house, and let us witness your performances.

We will suppose it is the first day of the school. “Come and read,” says the mistress to a little flaxen headed creature of doubtful gender; for the child is in petticoats, and sits on the female side, as close as possible to a guardian sister. But then those coarser features, tanned complexion, and close-clipped hair, with other minutiae of aspect, are somewhat contradictory to the feminine dress. “Come and read.” It is the first time that this he or she was ever

inside of a school-house, and in the presence of a shool-ma'am, according to recollection, and the order is heard with shrinking timidity. But the sister whispers an encouraging word, and helps "tot" down from the seat, who creeps out into the aisle, and hesitates along down to the teacher, biting his fingers, or scratching his head, perhaps both, to relieve the embarrassment of the novel situation, "What is your name, dear?" *Tholomon Icherthon*," lisps the now-discovered he, in a phlegm-choked voice, scarce above a whisper. "Put your hands down by your side, Solomon, and make a bow." He obeys, if a short and hasty jerk of the head is a bow. The alphabetical page of the spelling-book is presented, and he is asked, "What's that?" But he cannot tell. He is but two years and a half old, and has been sent to school to relieve his mother from trouble, rather than to learn. No one at home has yet shown or named a letter to him. He has never had even that celebrated character, round O, pointed out to his notice. It was

an older beginner, most probably, who, being asked a similar question about the first letter of the alphabet, replied, "I know him by sight, but can't tell him by name." But our namesake of the wise man does not know the gentleman even by sight, nor any of his twenty-five companions.

Solomon Richardson has at length said A, B, C, for the first time in his life. He has *read*. "That's a nice boy; make another bow, and go to your seat." He gives another jerk of the head, and whirls on his heel, and trots back to his seat, meeting the congratulatory smile of his sister with a satisfied grin, which, put into language would be, "There, I've read, ha'nt I?"

The little chit, at first so timid, and almost inaudible in enunciation, in a few days becomes accustomed to the place and the exercise; and, in obedience to the "Speak up loud, that's a good boy," he soon pipes off *A-er, B-er, C-er, &c.*, with a far-ringing shrillness, that vies even with chanticleer himself. Solomon went all the pleasant days of the first summer, and

nearly every day of the next, before he knew all the letters by sight, or could call them by name. Strange that it should take so long to become acquainted with these twenty-six characters, when, in a month's time, the same child becomes familiar with the forms and the names of hundreds of objects in nature around, or in use about his father's house, shop, or farm ! Not so very strange either, if we only reflect a moment. Take a child into a party of twenty-six persons, all strangers, and lead him from one to the other as fast as his little feet can patter, telling him their respective names, all in less than ten minutes ; do this four times a day even, and you would not be surprised if he should be weeks at least, if not months, in learning to designate them all by their names. Is it any matter of surprise, then, that the child should be so long in becoming acquainted with the alphabetical party, when he is introduced to them precisely in the manner above described ? Then, these are not of different heights, complexions, dresses, motions, and tones of

voice, as a living company have. But there they stand in an unalterable line, all in the same complexions and dress ; all just so tall, just so motionless and mute and uninteresting, and, of course, the most unrememberable figures in the world. No wonder that some should go to school, and "sit on a bench, and say A B C," as a little girl said, for a whole year, and still find themselves strangers to some of the sable company even then. Our little reader is permitted at length to turn a leaf, and he finds himself in the region of the Abs,—an expanse of little syllables, making me, who am given to comparisons, think of an extensive plain whereon there is no tree or shrub or plant, or any thing else inviting to the eye, and nothing but little stones, stones, stones, all about the same size. And what must the poor little learner do here ? Why, he must hop from cobble to cobble, if I may so call *ab*, *eb*, *ib*, as fast as he possibly can, naming each one, after the voice of the teacher, as he hurries along. And this must be kept up until he can de-

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nominate each lifeless and uninteresting object on the face of the desert.

After more or less months, the weary novice ceases to be an Ab-ite. He is next put into whole words of one syllable, arranged in columns. The first word we read in Perry that conveyed any thing like an idea, was the first one in the first column,—the word *ache*: ay, we did not easily forget what this meant when once informed; the corresponding idea, or rather feeling, was so often in our consciousness. *Ache*,—a very appropriate term with which to begin a course of education so abounding in pains of body and of mind.

After five pages of this perpendicular reading, if I may so call it, we entered on the horizontal, that is, on words arranged in sentences and paragraphs. This was reading in good earnest, as grown-up folks did, and something with which tiny childhood would be very naturally puffed up. “Easy Lessons” was the title of about a dozen separate chapters, scattered at intervals among the numerous spelling columns,

like brambly openings here and there amid the tall forest. Easy lessons, because they consisted mostly of little monosyllabic words, easy to be pronounced. But they were not easy as it regards being understood. They were made up of abstract moral sentences, presenting but a very faint meaning to the child, if any at all. Their particular application to his own conduct he would not perceive, of course, without help; and this it scarcely ever entered the head or the heart of the teacher to afford.

In the course of summers, how many I forget, we arrived at the most manly and dignified reading the illustrious Perry had prepared for us. It was entitled "Moral Tales and Fables." In these latter, beasts and birds talked like men; and strange sort of folks, called Jupiter, Mercury, and Juno, were pictured as sitting up in the clouds, and talking with men and animals on earth, or as down among them doing very unearthly things. To quote language in common use, we *kind o' believed it all to be true, and yet we kind o' didn't*. As for

the "moral" at the end, teachers never dreamed of attracting our attention to it. Indeed, we had no other idea of all these Easy Lessons, Tales, and Fables, than that they were to be syllabled from the tongue in the task of reading. That they were to sink into the heart, and make us better in life, never occurred to our simple understandings.

Among all the rest were five pieces of poetry,—charming stuff to read; the words would come along one after another so easily, and the lines would jingle so pleasantly together at the end, tickling the ear like two beads in a rattle. "Oh! give us poetry to read, of all things," we thought.

We generally passed directly from the spelling-book to the reading-book of the first class, although we were ranked the second class still. Or perhaps we took a book which had been formerly used by the first class; for a new reading book was generally introduced once in a few years in compliance with the earnest recommendation of the temporary teacher. While the

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first class were in Scott's Lessons, we of the second were pursuing their tracks, not altogether understandingly, through Adams' Understanding Reader. When a new master persuaded them into Murray, then we were admitted into Scott.

The principal requisites in reading, in these days, were to read fast, mind the "stops and marks," and speak up loud. As for suiting the tone to the meaning, no such thing was dreamed of, in our school at least. As much emphasis was laid on an insignificant *of* or *and* as on the most important word in the piece. But no wonder we did not know how to vary our tones, for we did not always know the meaning of the words, or enter into the general spirit of the composition. This was very frequently, indeed almost always, the case with the majority even of the first class. Parliamentary prose and Miltonic verse were just about as good as Greek for the purpose of modulating the voice according to meaning. It scarcely ever entered the heads of our teachers to question

us about the ideas hidden in the great, long words and spacious sentences. It is possible that they did not always discover it themselves. "Speak up there, and not read like a mouse in a cheese; and mind your stops,"—such were the principal directions respecting the important art of elocution. Important it was most certainly considered; for each class must read twice in the forenoon, and the same in the afternoon, from a quarter to half an hour each time, according to the size of the class. Had they read but once or twice, and but little at a time, and this with nice and very profitable attention to tone and sense, parents would have thought the master most miserably deficient in duty, and their children cheated out of their rights, notwithstanding the time thus saved should be most assiduously devoted to other all-important branches of education.

It ought not to be omitted, that the Bible, particularly the New Testament, was the reading twice a day, generally, for all the classes adequate to words of more than one

syllable. It was the only reading of several of the younger classes under some teachers. On this practice I shall make but a single remark. As far as my own experience and observation extended, reverence for the sacred volume was not deepened by this constant but exceedingly careless use.

But what a long and perhaps tedious chapter on this subject of reading! I had no idea of it when I began. Yet I have not put down the half that I could. These early impressions, when once started from their recesses, how they will teem forth!

CHAPTER XI.

HOW THEY USED TO SPELL.

THERE, the class have read; but they have something else to do before they take their seats. "Shut your books," says he who has been hearing them read. What makes this row of little countenances brighten up so suddenly, especially the upper end of it? What wooden faces and leaden eyes, two minutes ago! The reading was nothing to them,—those select sentences and maxims in Perry's Spelling-book which are tucked in between the fables. It is all as dull as a dirge to those life-loving boys and girls. They almost drowsed while they stood up in their places. But they are fully awake now. They are going to spell. But this in itself is the driest exercise to prepare for, and the driest to perform, of the whole round. The child cares no more in his heart about the arrangement of vowels

and consonants in the orthography of words, than he does how many chips lie one above another at the school-house wood-pile. But he does care, whether he is at the head or foot of his class; whether the money dangles from his own neck or another's. This is the secret of the interest in spelling. Emulation is awakened, ambition roused. There is something like the tug of strength in the wrestle, something of the alternation of hope and fear in a game of chance. There has been a special preparation for the trial. Observe this class any day, half an hour before they are called up to read. What a flitting from top to bottom of the spelling column, and what a flutter of lips and hissing of utterance! Now the eye twinkles on the page to catch a word, and now it is fixed on the empty air, while the orthography is syllabled over and over again in mind, until at length it is syllabled on the memory. But the time of trial has come; they have only to read first. "The third class may come and read." "O dear, I haven't got my spelling lesson," mutters

Charlotte to herself. She has just begun the art of writing this winter, and she lingered a little too long at her hooks and trammels. 'The lesson seems to her to have as many again hard words in it as common. What a flutter she is in! She got up above George in the forenoon, and she would not get down again for any thing. She is as slow in coming from her seat as she possibly can be and keep moving. She makes a chink in her book with her finger, and every now and then, during the reading exercise, steals a glance at a difficult word.

But the reading is over, and what a brightening up, as was said before, with the exception, perhaps, of two or three idle or stupid boys at that less honorable extremity of the class called the foot! That boy at the head—no, it *was* a boy; but Harriet has at length got above him; and, when girls once get to the head, get them away from it if you can. Once put the "pride of place" into their hearts, and how they will queen it! Then they are more sensitive

regarding any thing that might lower them in the eyes of others, and seem the least like disgrace. I have known a little girl to cry the half of one day, and look melancholy the whole of the next, on losing her place at the head. Girls are more likely to arrive at and keep the first place in the class, in consequence of a little more help from mother nature than boys get. I believe that they generally have a memory more fitted for catching and holding words and other signs addressed to the eye, than the other sex. That girl at the head has studied her spelling lesson, until she is as confident of every word as the unerring Perry himself. She can spell every word in the column in the order it stands without the master's "putting it out," she has been over it so many times. "Now, Mr. James, get up again if you can," thinks Harriet. I pity you, poor girl; for James has an ally that will blow over your proud castle in the air. Old Boreas, the king of the winds, will order out a snow-storm by and bye, to block up the roads, so that none but booted and weath-

er-proof males can get to school ; and you, Miss, must lose a day or two, and then find yourself at the foot with those blockhead boys who always abide there. But let it not be thought that all those foot lads are deficient in intellect. Look at them when the master's back is turned, and you will see mischievous ingenuity enough to convince you that they might surpass even James and Harriet, had some other faculties been called into exercise besides the mere memory of verbalities.

The most extraordinary spelling, and indeed reading machine, in our school, was a boy whom I shall call Memorur Wordwell. He was mighty and wonderful in the acquisition and remembrance of words,—of signs without the ideas signified. The alphabet he acquired at home before he was two years old. What exultation of parents, what exclamation from admiring visitors ! “There was never any thing like it.” He had almost accomplished his Abs before he was thought old enough for school. At an earlier age than usual, however, he was

sent; and then he went from *Ache* to *Abomination* in half the summers and winters it took the rest of us to go over the same space. Astonishing how quickly he mastered column after column, section after section, of obstinate orthographies. Those martial terms I have just used, together with our hero's celerity, put me in mind of Cæsar. So I will quote him. Memorus might have said in respect to the host of the spelling-book, "I came, I saw, I conquered." He generally stood at the head of a class, each one of whom was two years his elder. Poor creatures! they studied hard, some of them. but it did no good: Memorus Wordwell was born to be above them, as some men are said to have been "born to command." At the public examination of his first winter, the people of the district, and even the minister, thought it marvelous that such monstrous great words should be mastered by "such a leetle mite of a boy!" Memorus was mighty also in saying those after spelling matters—the Key, the Abbreviations, the Punctuation, &c. These things

were deemed of great account to be laid up in remembrance, although they were all very imperfectly understood, and some of them not understood at all.

Punctuation—how many hours, days, and even weeks, have I tugged away to lift, as it were, to roll up into the store-house of my memory, the many long, heavy sentences comprehended under this title! Only survey (we use this word when speaking of considerable space and bulk)—only survey the first sentence, a transcript of which I will endeavor to locate in these narrow bounds. I would have my readers of the rising generation know what mighty labors we little creatures of five, six, and seven years old were set to perform:—

“Punctuation is the art of pointing, or of dividing a discourse into periods by points, expressing the pauses to be made in the reading thereof, and regulating the cadence or elevation of the voice.”

There, I have labored weeks on that; for I always had the lamentable defect of mind not to be able to commit to memory

what I did not understand. My teachers never aided me with the least explanation of the above-copied sentence, nor of other reading of a similar character, which was likewise to be committed to memory. But this and all was nothing, as it were, to Memorus Wordwell. He was a very Hercules in this wilderness of words.

Master Wordwell was a remarkable reader too. He could rattle off a word as extensive as the name of a Russian noble, when he was but five years old, as easily as the schoolmaster himself. "He can read in the hardest chapters of the Testament as fast agin as I can," said his mother. "I never did see nothin beat it," exclaimed his father; "he speaks up as loud as a minister." But I have said enough about this prodigy. I have said thus much, because, although he was thought so surpassingly bright, he was the most decided ninny in the school. The fact is, he did not know what the sounds he uttered meant. It never entered his head, nor the heads of his parents and most of his teachers, that words

and sentences were written, and should be read, only to be understood. He lost some of his reputation, however, when he grew up towards twenty-one, and it was found that *numbers*, in more senses than one, were far above him in arithmetic.

One little anecdote about Memorus Wordwell before we let him go, and this long chapter shall be no longer.

It happened one day that the "cut and split" for the fire fell short, and Jonas Patch was out wielding the axe in school time. He had been at work about half an hour, when Memorus, who was perceived to have less to do than the rest, was sent out to take his place. He was about ten years old, and four years younger than Jonas. "Memorus, you may go out and spell Jonas." Our hero did not think of the Yankee sense in which the master used the word *spell*: indeed he had never attached but one meaning to it, whenever it was used with reference to himself. He supposed the master was granting him a ride extraordinary on his favorite hobby. So he put his spelling-book

under his arm, and was out at the wood-pile with the speed of a boy rushing to play.

"Ye got yer spellin lesson, Jonas?" was his first salutation. "Have n't looked at it yit," was the reply. "I mean to cut up this plaugy great log, spellin or no spellin, before I go in. I had as lieve keep warm here choppin wood, as freeze up there in that tarnal cold back seat." "Well, the master sent me out to hear you spell." "Did he? well, put out the words, and I'll spell." Memorus being so distinguished a speller, Jonas did not doubt but that he was really sent out on this errand. So our deputy spelling-master mounted the top of the wood-pile, just in front of Jonas, to put out words to his temporary pupil, who still kept on putting out chips.

"Do you know where the lesson begins, Jonas?" "No, I don't; but I 'spose I shall find out now." "Well, here 'tis." (They both belonged to the same class.) "Spell A-bom-i-na-tion." Jonas spells. A-b-o-m bom a-bom (in the mean time up goes the axe high in air), i a-bom-i (down it

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goes again chuck into the wood) n-a na a-bom-i-na (up it goes again) t-i-o-n tion, a-bom-i-na-tion; chuck the axe goes again, and at the same time out flies a furious chip, and hits Memorus on the nose. At this moment the master appeared just at the corner of the school-house, with one foot still on the threshold. "Jonas, why don't you come in? didn't I send Memorus out to spell you?" "Yes, sir, and he has been spelling me; how could I come in if he spelt me here?" At this the master's eye caught Memorus perched upon the top-stick, with his book open upon his lap, rubbing his nose, and just in the act of putting out the next word of the column. Ac-com-mo-da-tion, pronounced Memorus in a broken but louder voice than before; for he had caught a glimpse of the master, and he wished to let him know that he was doing his duty. This was too much for the master's gravity. He perceived the mistake, and, without saying more, wheeled back into the school-room, almost bursting with the most tumultuous laugh he ever tried to

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suppress. The scholars wondered at his looks, and grinned in sympathy. But in a few minutes Jonas came in, followed by Memorus with his spelling-book, who exclaimed, "I have heard him spell clean through the whole lesson, and he didn't spell hardly none of 'em right." The master could hold in no longer, and the scholars perceived the blunder, and there was one simultaneous roar from pedagogue and pupils; the scholars laughing twice as loud and uproariously in consequence of being permitted to laugh in school-time, and to do it with the accompaniment of the master.

## CHAPTER XII.

MR. SPOUTSOUND, THE SPEAKING MASTER—THE  
EXHIBITION.

Now comes winter the sixth, of my district education. Our master was as insignificant a personage as is often met with beyond the age of twenty-one. He ought to have been pedagogue in that land of littleness, Lilliput. Our great fellows of the back seat might have tossed him out of the window from the palm of the hand. But he possessed certain qualifications, and pursued such a course that he was permitted to retain the magisterial seat through his term, and indeed was quite popular on the whole.

He was as remarkable for the loudness and compass of his voice, as for the diminutiveness of his material dimensions. How such a body of sound could proceed from so bodiless an existence, was a marvel. It

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seemed as unnatural as that a tremendous thunder-clap should burst from a speck of cloud in the sky. He generally sat with the singers on the Sabbath, and drowned the feebler voices with the inundation of his bass.

But it was not with his tuneful powers alone, that he "astorished the natives." He was imagined to possess great gifts of oratory likewise. "What a pity it is that he had not been a minister!" was said. It was by his endowments and taste in this respect that he made himself particularly memorable in our school. Mr. Spoutsound had been one quarter to an academy where declamation was a weekly exercise. Finding in this ample scope for his vocal extraordinariness (a long-winded word, to be sure, but so appropriate), he became an enthusiastic votary to the Ciceronian art. The principal qualification of an orator in his view, was height, depth, and breadth of utterance,—quantity of sound. Of course, he fancied himself a very lion in oratory. Indeed, as far as roaring would go, he was a

lion. This gentleman introduced declamation, or the speaking of pieces, as it was called, into our school. He considered "speaking of the utmost consequence in this country, as any boy might be called to a seat in the legislature, perhaps, in the course of things." It was a novelty to the scholars, and they entered with their whole souls into the matter. It was a pleasant relief to the dullness of the old-fashioned routine.

What a rummaging of books, pamphlets, and newspapers now took place, to find pieces to speak! The American Preceptor, the Columbian Orator, the Art of Reading, Scott's Elocution, Webster's Third Part, and I know not how many other ancients, were taken down from their dusty retirement at home, for the sake of the specimens of eloquence they afforded. Those pieces were deemed best by us, grandsons of the Revolutionists, which most abounded in those glorious words, Freedom, Liberty, Independence, and other spirit-kindling names and phrases, that might be mention-

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ed. Another recommendation was high-flown language, and especially words that were long and sonorous, such as would roll thunderingly from the tongue. For, like our district professor, we had the impression that noise was the most important quality in eloquence. The first, the second, and the third requisite was the same; it was noise, noise, noise. Action, however, or gesticulation, was not omitted. This was considered the next qualification of the good orator. So there was the most vehement swinging of arms, shaking of fists, and waving of palms. That occasional motion of the limb and force of voice, called emphasis, was not a characteristic of our eloquence, or rather it was all emphasis. Our utterance was something like the continuous roar of a swollen brook over a mill-dam, and our action like the unintermitted whirling and clapping of adjacent machinery.

We tried our talent in the dramatic way likewise. There were numerous extracts from dramatic compositions scattered through the various reading books we had

mustered. These dialogistic performances were even more interesting than our speechifying in the semblance of lawyers and legislators. We more easily acquired an aptitude for this exercise, as it was somewhat like that every-day affair, conversation. In this we were brought face to face, voice to voice, with each other, and our social sympathies were kindled into glow. We talked with, as well as at, folks. Then the female portion of the school could take a part in the performance; and who does not know that dialoguing, as well as dancing, has twice the zest with a female partner? The whole school, with the exception of the very least perhaps, were engaged, indeed absorbed, in this novel branch of education introduced by Mr. Spoutsound. Some, who had not got out of their Abs, were taught, by admiring fathers and mothers at home, little pieces by rote, and made to screech them out with a most ear-splitting execution. One lad in this way committed to memory that famous piece of self-puffery beginning with the lines,—

“ You’d scarce expect one of my age
To speak in public on the stage.”

Memorus Wordwell committed to memory and parroted forth that famous speech of Pitt, in which he so eloquently replies to the charge of being a young man.

Cicero at Athens was not more assiduous in seeking the “immense and the infinite” in eloquence, than we were in seeking the great in speaking. Besides half an hour of daily school-time set apart for the exercise under the immediate direction and exemplification of the master, our noonings were devoted to the same, as far as the young’s ruling passion, the love of play, would permit. And on the way to and from school, the pleasure of dialogue would compete with that of dousing each other into the snow. We even “spoke” while doing our night and morning work at home. A boy might be seen at the wood-pile hacking at a log and a dialogue by turns. Or perhaps, after dispensing the fodder to the tenants of the barn, he would mount a half-cleared

scaffold, and out-bellow the wondering beeves below.

As the school drew towards a close, Mr. Spoutsound proposed to have an exhibition in addition to the usual examination, on the last day, or rather the evening of it. Our oratorical gifts and accomplishments must be publicly displayed; which is next to publicly using them in the important affairs of the town, the state, or the country.

“An Exhibition!—I want to know! can it be?” There had never been any thing like it in the district before, nor indeed in the town. Such a thing had scarcely been heard of, except by some one whose uncle or cousin had been to the academy or to college. The people of the district were wide awake. The younger portion of them could hardly sleep nights.

The scholars are requested to select the pieces they would prefer to speak, whether speeches or dialogues; and to arrange among themselves who should be fellow-partners in the dramatical performances. The master, however, retained the right of

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veto on their choice. Now, what a rustle of leaves and flutter of lips in school-hours, and noisier flapping of books and clatter of tongues at noon, in settling who shall have which, and who speak with whom. At length all is arranged, and mostly to the minds of all. Then, for a week or two before the final consummation of things eloquent, it was nothing but rehearsal. No pains were spared by any one that he might be perfect in the recollection and flourishing-off of his part. Dialoguists were grouped together in every corner. There was a buzz in the back seat, a hum in the closet, a screech in the entry, and the very climax of vociferation in the spelling-floor. Here the solos (if I may borrow a term from music) were rehearsed under the immediate criticism of Mr. Spoutsound, whose chief delight was in forensic and parliamentary eloquence. The old school-house was a little Babel in the confusion of tongues.

The expected day at length arrives. There must be, of course, the usual examination in the afternoon. But nobody at-

tended this but the minister, and the committee who engaged the master. The people of the district all intended to be at the exhibition in the evening, and examination was "just nothing at all" with that in prospect. And, in fact, it *was* just nothing at all; for the "ruling passion" had swallowed up very much of the time that should have been devoted to the really important branches of education.

After the finishing of the school, a stage was erected at the end of the spelling-floor, next to the desk and the closet. It was hung round with checked bed-blankets, in the semblance of theatrical curtains, to conceal any preparations that might be necessary between the pieces.

The exhibition was to commence at half-past six. Before that time, the old school-house was crowded to the utmost of its capacity for containing, by the people not only of our district, but of other parts of the town. The children were wedged into chinks too narrow for the admission of the grown-up. Never were a multitude of liv-

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ing bodies more completely compressed and amalgamated into one continuous mass.

On the front writing-bench, just before the stage, and facing the audience, sat the four first, and some of the most interesting performers on the occasion, viz.; players on the clarionet, violin, bass-viol, and bassoon. But they of the bow were sorely troubled at first. Time and space go together with them, you know. They cannot keep the first without possessing the latter. As they sat, their semibreves were all shortened into minims, indeed into crotchets, for lack of elbow-room. At length the violinist stood up straight on the writing-bench, so as to have an unimpeded stretch in the empty air, above the thicket of heads. His fellow-sufferer then contrived to stand so that his long bow could sweep freely between the steady heads of two broad-shouldered men, out of danger from joggling boys. This band discoursed what was to our ears most eloquent music, as a prelude to the musical eloquence which was to be the chief entertainment of the occasion.

They played intermediately also, and gave the winding-off flourish of sound.

At forty minutes past six, the curtain rose; that is, the bed-blankets were pulled aside. There stood Mr. Spoutsound on the stage, in all the pomp possible to diminutiveness. He advanced two steps, and bowed as profoundly from height to depth as his brevity of stature would admit. He then opened the exhibition by speaking a poetical piece called a Prologue, which he found in one of the old reading-books. As this was originally composed as an introduction to a stage performance, it was thought appropriate on this occasion. Mr. Spoutsound now put forth in all the plenitude of his utterance. It seemed a vocal cataract, all torrent, thunder, and froth. But it wanted room,—an abyss to empty into; and all it had was the remnant of space left in our little school-room. A few of the audience were overwhelmed with the pour and rush and roar of the pent-up noise, and the rest with admiration, yea,

astonishment, that the schoolmaster "*could speak so.*"

He ceased—it was all as still as if every other voice had died of envy. He bowed—there was then a general breathing, as if the vocals were just coming to life again. He sat down on a chair placed on the stage; then there was one general buzz, above which arose, here and there, a living and loud voice. Above this, soon arose the exaltation of the orator's favorite march; for he deemed it proper that his own performance should be separated from those of his pupils by some length and loftiness of music.

Now the exhibition commenced in good earnest. The dramatists dressed in costumes according to the character to be sustained, as far as all the old and odd dresses that could be mustered up would enable them to do so. The district, and indeed the town, had been ransacked for revolutionary coats and cocked-up hats and other grand-fatherly and grand-motherly attire.

The people present were quite as much

amused with the spectacle as with the speaking. To see the old fashions on the young folks, and to see the young folks personating characters so entirely opposite to their own; for instance, the slim, pale-faced youth, by the aid of stuffing, looking, and acting the fat old wine-bibber; the blooming girl of seventeen, putting on the cap, the kerchief, and the character of seventy-five, &c.—all this was ludicrously strange. A very refined taste might have observed other things that were strangely ludicrous in the elocution and gesticulation of these disciples of Mr. Spoutsound; but most of the company present were so fortunate as to perceive no bad taste to mar their enjoyment.

The little boy of five spoke the little piece—

“You’d scarce expect one of my age,” &c.

I recollect another line of the piece which has become singularly verified in the history of the lad. It is this—

“Tall oaks from little acorns grow.”

Now, this acorn of eloquence, which sprouted forth so vigorously on this occasion, has at length grown into a mighty oak of oratory on his native hills. He has flourished in a Fourth of July oration before his fellow-townsmen.

Memorus Wordwell, who at this time was eleven years old, yelped forth the aforementioned speech of Pitt. In the part replying to the taunt that the author of the speech was a young man, Memorus "beat all." Next to the master himself, he excited the greatest admiration, and particularly in his father and mother.

But this chapter must be ended, so we will skip to the end of this famous exhibition. At a quarter past ten, the curtain dropped for the last time; that is, the bed-blankets were pulled down and put into the sleighs of their owners, to be carried home to be spread over the dreamers of acts, instead of being hung before the actors of dreams. The little boys and girls did not get to bed till eleven o'clock that night, nor all of them to sleep till twelve. They

were never more the pupils of Mr. Spout-sound. He soon migrated to one of the states beyond the Alleghany. There he studied law not more than a year certainly, and was admitted to the Bar. It is rumored that he soon *spoke* himself into the legislature, and as soon spoke himself out again. Whether he will speak himself into Congress is a matter of exceeding doubt. I have nothing more to add respecting the speaking master, or the speaking, excepting that one shrewd old man was heard to say on leaving the school-house, exhibition night, "A great *cry*, but little wool."

CHAPTER XIII.

LEARNING TO WRITE.

THE winter I was nine years old, I made another advance toward the top of the ladder, in the circumstance of learning to write. I desired and pleaded to commence the chirographical art the summer, and indeed the winter before; for others of my own age were at it thus early. But my father said that my fingers were hardly stout enough to manage a quill from his geese; but that, if I would put up with the quill of a hen, I might try. This pithy satire put an end to my teasing.

Having previously had the promise of writing this winter, I had made all the necessary preparations, days before school was to begin. I had bought me a new birch ruler, and had given a third of my wealth, four cents, for it. To this I had appended, by a well-twisted flaxen string,

a plummet of my own running, whittling, and scraping. I had hunted up an old pewter inkstand, which had come down from the ancestral eminence of my great grandfather, for aught I know; and it bore many marks of a speedier and less honorable descent, to wit, from table or desk to the floor. I had succeeded in becoming the owner of a pen-knife, not that it was likely to be applied to its appropriate use that winter at least; for such beginners generally used the instrument to mar that kind of pens they wrote in, rather than to make or mend those they wrote with. I had selected one of the fairest quills out of an enormous bunch. Half a quire of foolscap had been folded into the shape of a writing-book by the maternal hand, and covered with brown paper, nearly as thick as a sheepskin.

Behold me now, on the first Monday in December, starting for school, with my new and clean writing-book buttoned under my jacket, my inkstand in my pocket, a bundle of necessary books in one hand, and my ruler and swinging plummet in the other,

which I flourished in the air and around my head, till the sharpened lead made its first mark on my own face. My long white-feathered goose-quill was twisted into my hat-band, like a plummy badge of the distinction to which I had arrived, and the important enterprise before me.

On arriving at the school-house, I took a seat higher up and more honorable than the one I occupied the winter before. At the proper time, my writing-book, which, with my quill, I had handed to the master on entering, was returned to me, with a copy set, and paper ruled and pen made. My copy was a single straight mark, at the first corner of my manuscript. "A straight mark! who could not make so simple a thing as that?" thought I. I waited, however, to see how the boy next to me, a beginner also, should succeed, as he had got ready a moment before me. Never shall I forget the first chirographical exploit of this youth. That inky image will never be eradicated from my memory, so long as a single trace of early experience is left on

its tablet. The factis, it was an epoch in my life: something great was to be done, and my attention was intensely awake to whatever had a bearing on this new and important trial of my powers. I looked to see a mark as straight as a ruler, having its four corners as distinctly defined as the angles of a parallelogram.

But, O me! what a spectacle! What a shocking contrast to my anticipation! That mark had as many crooks as a ribbon in the wind, and nearer eight angles than four; and its two sides were nearly as rough and as notched as a fine handsaw; and, indeed, the mark somewhat resembled it in width, for the fellow had laid in a store of ink sufficient to last the journey of the whole line. "Shame on him!" said I, internally, "I can beat that, I know." I began by setting my pen firmly on the paper, and I brought a mark half-way down with rectilinear precision. But by this time my head began to swim, and my hand to tremble. I was as it were in vacancy, far below the upper ruling, and as far above the lower.

My self-possession failed ; my pen diverged to the right, then to the left, crooking all the remainder of its way, with as many zig-zags as could well be in so short a distance. Mine was as sad a failure as my neighbor's. I covered it over with my fingers, and did not jog him with a "see there," as I had vainly anticipated.

So much for pains-taking, now for chance. By good luck the next effort was quite successful. I now dashed on, for better or worse, till in one half-hour I had covered the whole page with the standing, though seemingly falling, monuments of the chirographical wisdom of my teacher, and skill of myself. In the afternoon a similar copy was set, and I dashed on again as if I had taken so much writing by the job, and my only object was to save time. Now and then there was quite a reputable mark ; but alas—for him whose perception of the beautiful was particularly delicate, should he get a glimpse of these sloughs of ink !

The third morning, my copy was the first element of the *m* and *n*, or what in bur-

lesque is called a hook. On my fourth, I had the last half of the same letters, or the trammel; and indeed they were the similitudes of hooks and trammels, forged in a country plenteous in iron, and by the youngest apprentice at the hammer and anvil.

In this way I went through all the small letters, as they are called. First, the elements or constituent parts, then the whole character in which these parts were combined.

Then I must learn to make the capitals, before entering on joining hand. Four pages were devoted to these. Capital letters! They were capital offences against all that is graceful, indeed decent, yea tolerable, in that art which is so capable of beautiful forms and proportions.

I came next to joining hand, about three weeks after my commencement; and joining hand indeed it was! It seemed as if my hooks and trammels were overheated in the forge, and were melted into each other; the shapeless masses so clung to-

gether at points where they ought to have been separate, so very far were they from all resemblance to conjoined, yet distinct and well-defined characters.

Thus I went on, a perfect little prodigal in the expenditure of paper, ink, pens and time. The first winter, I splashed two, and the next, three writing-books with inky puddle, in learning coarse hand; and, after all, I had gained not much in penmanship, except a workmanlike assurance and celerity of execution, such as is natural to an old hand at the business.

The third winter, I commenced small hand, or rather fine, as it is more technically denominated; or rather a copy of half-way dimensions, that the change to fine running-hand might not be too sudden. From this dwarfish coarse, or giant fine hand,—just as you please to call it,—I slid down to the genuine epistolary and mercantile, with a capital at the head of the line, as much out of proportion as a corpulent old captain marching in single file before a parade of little boys.

Some of our teachers were accustomed to spend a few minutes, forenoon and afternoon, in going round among the writers to see that they held the pen properly, and took a decent degree of pains. But the majority of them, according to present recollections, never stirred from the desk to superintend this branch. There was something like an excuse, however, for not visiting their pupils while at the pen. Sitting as they did in those long, narrow, rickety seats, one could hardly be got at without joggling two or three others, displacing a writing-book, knocking over an inkstand, and making a deal of rustle, rattle, and racket.

Some of the teachers set the copies at home in the evening, but most set them in school. Six hours per day were all that custom required of a teacher: of course, half an hour at home spent in the matters of the school would have been time and labor not paid for, and a gratuity not particularly expected. On entering in the morning, and looking for the master as the

object at which to make the customary "manners," we could perceive just the crown of his head beyond a huge stack of manuscripts, which, together with his copy-setting attention, prevented the bowed and courtesied respects from his notice. A few of the most advanced in penmanship had copper-plate slips, as they were called, tucked into their manuscripts, for the trial of their more skillful hands; or, if an ordinary learner had for once done extraordinarily well, he was permitted a slip as a mark of merit, and a circumstance of encouragement. Sometimes, when the master was pressed for time, all the joining-handers were thus furnished. It was a pleasure to have copies of this sort; their polished shades, graceful curves, and delicate hair lines, were so like a picture for the eye to dwell upon. But, when we set about the work of imitation, discouragement took the place of pleasure. "After all, give us the master's hand," we thought; "we can come up to that now and then." We despaired of ever becoming decent penmen with

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this copper-plate perfection mocking our clumsy fingers.

There was one item in penmanship which our teachers generally omitted altogether. It was the art of making and mending pens. I suffer, and others on my account suffer, from this neglect even at this day. The untraceable "partridge tracks," as some one called them, with which I perplex my correspondents, and am now about to provoke the printer, are chargeable to my ignorance in pen-making. It is a fact, however some acquaintances may doubt it, that I generally write very legibly, if not gracefully, whenever I borrow, beg, or steal a pen.

Let not the faithful Wrifford, should his eye chance to fall on this lament, think that I have forgotten his twelve lessons, of one hour each, on twelve successive, cold November days, when I was just on the eve of commencing pedagogue for the first time—(for I, too, have kept a district school, in a manner somewhat like "as it was")—I have not forgotten them. He did well for me.

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But, alas! his tall form bent over my shoulder, his long flexile finger adjusted my pen, and his vigilant eye glanced his admonitions, in vain. That thirteenth lesson which he added gratis, to teach us pen-making, I was so unfortunate as to lose. Lamentable to me and to many others, that I was kept away.

I blush while I acknowledge it, but I have taught school, have taught penmanship, have made and mended a hundred pens a day, and all the time I knew not much more of the art of turning quill into pen, than did the goose from whose wing it was plucked. But my manufactures were received by my pupils, as good. Good, of course, they must be; for the master made them, and who should dare to question *his* competency? If the instrument did not operate well, the fault must certainly be in the fingers that wielded, not those that wrought it.

O ye pedagogues, whom I have here condemned to "everlasting fame!" taking it for granted that this record will be famous

forever, be not too angry with my humble authorship; for I, too, let it be repeated, have *kept* a district school as it *was*, as well as *been* to one. But, brother pedagogues of the past! I will tell you what I purpose to do: perhaps some of you will purpose to do so likewise. Should this exposure of our deficiencies meet with a tolerable sale, I purpose to employ a teacher in the art of cutting, splitting, and shaving pen timber into the best possible fitness for chirographic use. It is my heart's hope, and it shall be my hand's care, that he may not teach in vain. Then, if I cannot make amends to my cheated pupils, I trust that the wearied eyes and worn-out patience of former tracers of "partridge tracks" shall recover, to be thus wearied and worn out no more.

CHAPTER XIV.

SEVENTH WINTER, BUT NOT MUCH ABOUT IT—
EIGHTH WINTER—MR. JOHNSON—GOOD OR-
DER, AND BUT LITTLE PUNISHING—A STORY
ABOUT PUNISHING—NINTH WINTER.

OF my seventh winter I have but little to say; for but little was done worthy of record here. We had an indolent master and an idle school. Some tried to kindle up the speaking spirit again; but the teacher had no taste that way. But there was dialoguing enough nevertheless—in that form called *whispering*. Our school was a theatre in earnest; for “plays” were going on all the time. It was “acting” to the life, acting anyhow rather than like scholars at their books. But let that winter and its works, or rather want of works, pass. Of the eighth I can say something worth notice I think.

In consequence of the lax discipline of the two last winters, the school had fallen into very idle and turbulent habits. "A master that will keep order, a master that will keep order!" was the cry throughout the district. Accordingly such a one was sought, and fortunately found. A certain Mr. Johnson, who had taught in a neighboring town, was famous for his strictness, and that without much punishing. He was obtained at a little higher price than usual, and was thought to be well worth the price. I will describe his person, and relate an incident as characteristic of the man.

Mr. Johnson was full six feet high, with the diameter of his chest and limbs in equal proportion. His face was long, and as dusky as a Spaniard's; and the dark was still darkened by the roots of an enormous beard. His eyes were black, and looked floggings and blood from out their cavernous sockets, which were overhung by eyebrows not unlike brush-heaps. His hair was black and curly, and extended down, and

expanded on each side of his face in a pair of whiskers a freebooter might have envied.

He possessed the longest, widest, and thickest ruler I ever saw. This was seldom brandished in his hand, but generally lay in sight upon the desk. Although he was so famous for his orders in school, he scarcely ever had to use his punitive instrument. His look, bearing, and voice were enough for the subjection of the most riotous school. Never was our school so still and so studious as this winter. A circumstance occurred the very first day, which drove every thing like mischief in consternation from every scholar's heart. Abijah Wilkins had for years been called the worst boy in school. Masters could do nothing with him. He was surly, saucy, profane, and truthless. Mr. Patch took him from an alms-house when he was eight years old, which was eight years before the point of time now in view. In his family were mended neither his disposition, his manners, nor even his clothes. He looked like a morose, unpitied pauper still. He had

shaken his knurly and filthy fist in the very face and eyes of the last winter's teacher. Mr. Johnson was told of this son of perdition before he began, and was prepared to take some efficient step at his first offence.

Well, the afternoon of the first day, Abijah thrust a pin into a boy beside him, which made him suddenly cry out with the sharp pain. The sufferer was questioned; Abijah was accused, and found guilty. The master requested James Clark to go to his room, and bring a rattan he would find there, as if the formidable ferule was unequal to the present exigency. James came with a rattan very long and very elastic, as if it had been selected from a thousand, not to walk with, but to whip. Then he ordered all the blinds next to the road to be closed. He then said, "Abijah, come this way." He came. "The school may shut their books, and suspend their studies a few minutes. Abijah, take off your frock, fold it up, lay it on the seat behind you." Abijah obeyed these several commands with sullen tardiness. Here, a boy up towards

the back seat burst out with a sort of shuddering laugh, produced by a nervous excitement he could not control. "Silence!" said the master, with a thunder, and a stamp on the floor that made the house quake. All was as still as midnight—not a foot moved, not a seat cracked, not a book rustled. The school seemed to be appalled. The expression of every countenance was changed; some were unnaturally pale, some flushed, and eighty distended and moistening eyes were fastened on the scene. The awful expectation was too much for one poor girl. "May I go home?" she whined with an imploring and terrified look. A single cast from the countenance of authority crushed the trembler down into her seat again. A tremulous sigh escaped from one of the larger girls, then all was breathlessly still again. "Take off your jacket also, Abijah. Fold it, and lay it on your frock." Mr. Johnson then took his chair, and set it away at the farthest distance the floor would permit, as if all the space that could be had would be necessa-

ry for the operations about to take place. He then took the rattan, and seemed to examine it closely, drew it through his hand, bent it almost double, laid it down again. He then took off his own coat, folded it up, and laid it on the desk. Abijah's breast then heaved like a bellows, his limbs began to tremble, and his face was like a sheet. The master now took the rattan in his right hand, and the criminal by the collar with his left, his large knuckles pressing hard against the shoulder of the boy. He raised the stick high over the shrinking back. Then, oh! what a screech! Had the rod fallen? No, it still remained suspended in the air. "O—I wont do so agin—I'll *never* do so agin—O—O—don't—I will be good—sartinly will." The threatening instrument of pain was gently taken from its elevation. The master spoke: "You promise, do you?" "Yis, sir,—oh! yis, sir." The tight grasp was withdrawn from the collar. "Put on your frock and jacket, and go to your seat. The rest of you may open your books again." The school breathed again. Paper

rustled, feet were carefully moved, the seats slightly cracked, and all things went stilly on as before. Abijah kept his promise. He became an altered boy; obedient; peaceable, studious. This long and slow process of preparing for the punishment was artfully designed by the master, gradually to work up the boy's terrors and agonizing expectations to the highest pitch, until he should yield like a babe to the intensity of his emotions. His stubborn nature, which had been like an oak on the hills which no storm could prostrate, was whittled away and demolished, as it were, sliver by sliver.

Not Abijah Wilkins only, but the whole school were subdued to the most humble and habitual obedience by the scene I have described. The terror of it seemed to abide in their hearts. The school improved much this winter, that is, according to the ideas of improvement then prevailing. Lessons were well gotten, and well said, although the *why* and the *wherefore* of them were not asked or given.

Mr. Johnson was employed the next win-

ter also, and it was the prevailing wish that he should be engaged for the third time; but he could not be obtained. His reputation as a teacher had secured for him a school at twenty dollars per month for the year round, in a distant village; so we were never more to sit "as still as mice," in his most magisterial presence. For years the saying in the district, in respect to him was, "He was the best master I ever went to; he kept such good order, and punished so little."

CHAPTER XV.

GOING OUT—MAKING BOWS—BOYS COMING IN—
GIRLS GOING OUT AND COMING IN.

THE young are proverbially ignorant of the value of time. There is one portion of it, however, which they well know how to appreciate. They feel it to be a wealth both to body and soul. Its few moments are truly golden ones, forming a glittering spot amid the drossy dullness of in-school duration. I refer to the forenoon and afternoon recess for "going out." Consider that we came from all the freedom of the farm, where we had the sweep of acres—hills, valleys, woods, and waters, and were crowded, I may say packed, into the district box. Each one had scarcely more space than would allow him to shift his head from an inclination to one shoulder to an inclination to the other, or from leaning on

the right elbow, to leaning on the left. There we were, the blood of health bouncing through our veins, feeding our strength, swelling our dimensions; and there we must stay, three hours on a stretch, with the exception of the afore-mentioned recess. No wonder that we should prize this brief period high, and rush tumultuously out doors to enjoy it.

There is one circumstance in going out which so much amuses my recollection, that I will venture to describe it to my readers. It is the making of our bows, or manners, as it is called. If one wishes to see variety in the doing of a single act, let him look at school-boys, leaving their bows at the door. Tell me not of the diversities and characteristics, of the gentilities and the awkwardnesses in the civility of shaking hands. The bow is as diversified and characteristic, as awkward or genteel, as any movement many-motioned man is called on to make. Especially in a country school, where fashion and politeness have not altered the tendencies of nature by forming the man-

ners of all after one model of propriety. Besides, the bow was before the shake, both in the history of the world, and in that of every individual man. No doubt the world's first gentleman, nature-taught, declined his head in some sort, in saluting for the first time the world's first lady, in primitive Eden. And no doubt every little boy has been instructed to make a "nice bow," from chubby Cain, Abel, and Seth, down to the mannered younglings of the present day.

Well, then, it is near half-past ten, A. M., but seemingly eleven to the impatient youngsters; anticipation rather than reflection, being the faculty most in action just now. At last the master takes out his watch, and gives a hasty glance at the index of of the hour. Or, if this premonitory symptom does not appear, watching eyes can discern the signs of the time in the face relaxing itself from severe duty, and in the moving lips just assuming that precise form necessary to pronounce the sentence of liberation. Then, make ready, take aim, is

at once the order of every idler. "The boys may go out." The little white heads on the little seat, as it is called, are the foremost, having nothing in front to impede a straight-forward sally. One little nimble-foot is at the door in an instant; and, as he lifts the latch, he tosses off a bow over his left shoulder, and is out in a twinkling. The next perhaps squares himself towards the master with more precision, not having his attention divided between opening the door and leaving his manners. Next comes the very least of the little, just in front of the big-boy rush behind him, tap-tapping and tottering along the floor, with his finger in his nose; but, in wheeling from his bow, he blunders head first through the door, in his anxiety to get out of the way of the impending throng of fists and knees behind, in avoiding which he is prostrated under the tramp of cowhide.

Now come the Bigs from behind the writing benches. Some of them make a bow with a jerk of the head and snap of the neck possible only to giddy-brained, oily-

jointed boyhood. Some, whose mothers are of the precise cast, or who have had their manners stiffened at a dancing-school, will wait till the throng is a little thinned; and then they will strut out with their arms as straight at their sides as if there were no such things as elbows, and will let their upper person bend upon the middle hinge, as if this were the only joint in their frames. Some look straight at their toes, as the face descends toward the floor. Others strain a glance up at the master, displaying an uncommon proportion of that beauty of the eye,—the white. Lastly come the tenants of the extreme back seat, the Anaks of the school. One long-limbed, lank-sided, back-bending fellow of twenty is at the door at four strides; he has the proper curve already prepared by his ordinary gait, and he has nothing to do but swing round towards the master, and his manners are made. Another, whose body is developed in the full proportions of manhood, turns himself half way, and just gives the slightest inclination of the person. He thinks himself too much

of a man to make such a ridiculous popping of the pate as the younglings who have preceded him. Another, with a tread that makes the floor tremble, goes straight out through the open door, without turning to the right or left; as much as to say, "I am quite too old for that business."

There are two in the short seat at the end of the spelling floor who have almost attained to the glorious, or rather vain-glorious age of twenty-one. They are perhaps even more aged than the venerable Rabbi of the school himself. So they respect their years, and put away childish things, inasmuch as they do not go out as their juniors do. One of them sticks to his slate. It is his last winter; and, as he did not catch flying time by the forelock, he must cling to his heel. The other unpuckers his arithmetical brow, puts his pencil between his teeth, leans his head on his right palm, with his left fingers adjusts his foretop, and then composes himself into an amiable gaze upon the fair remainder of the school. Perhaps his eyes leap at once to that damsel of

eighteen in the furthestmost seat, who is the secret mistress of his heart.

How still it is in the absence of half the limbs and lips of the domain! That little girl who has been buzzing round her lesson like a bee round a honey-suckle, off and on by turns, is now sipping its sweets, if any sweets there be, as closely and stilly as that same bee plunged in the bell of the flower. The secret of the unwonted silence is, the master knows on which side of the aisle to look for noise and mischief now.

It is time for the boys to come in. The master raps on the window as a signal. At first they scatter in one by one, keeping the door on the slam, slam. But soon, in rush the main body, pell-mell, rubbing their ears, kicking their heels, puffing, panting, wheezing. Impelled by the temporary chill, they crowd round the fire, regaining the needed warmth as much by the exercise of elbows as by the heat of fuel. "Take your seats, you that have got warm," says the master. No one starts. "Take your seats, all of you." Tramp, tramp, how the floor

trembles again, and the seats clatter. There goes an ink-stand. Ben pinches Tom to let him know that he must go in first. Tom stands back; but gives Ben a kick on the shins as he passes, to pay for that pinch.

“The girls may go out.” The noise and confusion are now of the feminine gender. Trip, trip, rustle, rustle. Shall I describe the diversities of the courtesy? I could pen a trait or two, but prefer to leave the subject to the more discriminating quill of the courtesying sex. The shrill tones and gossiping chatter of girlhood now ring from without. But they do not stay long. Trip, trip, rustle, rustle, back again. Half of them are sucking a lump of snow for drink. One has broken an icicle from the well-spout, and is nibbling it as she would a stick of candy. See Sarah jump. The ice-eater’s cold, dripping hand has mischievously sprinkled her neck. Down goes the melting little cone, and is scattered in shivers. “Take your seats,” says authority with soft command. He is immediately obeyed; and the dull routine rolls on toward noon.

CHAPTER XVI.

NOON—NOISE AND DINNER—SPORTS AT SCHOOL
— COASTING — SNOW-BALLING — A CERTAIN
MEMORABLE SNOW-BALL BATTLE.

Noon has come. It is even half-past twelve; for the teacher got puzzled with a hard sum, and did not attend to the second reading of the first class so soon as usual by half an hour. It has been hitch, hitch—joggle, joggle—creak, creak, all over the school-room for a considerable time. “You are dismissed,” comes at last. The going out of half the school only was a noisy business; but now there is a tenfold thunder, augmented by the windy rush of many petticoats. All the voices of all the tongues now split or rather shatter the air, if I may so speak. There are more various tones than could be indicated by all the epithets ever applied to sound.

* The first manual operation is the extracting of certain parcels from pockets, bags, baskets, hat-crowns, and perhaps the capacious cavity formed by the tie of a short open frock. Then what a savory development,—bread, cheese, cakes, pies, sausages, and apples without number! It is voice *versus* appetite now for the occupancy of the mouth. Or, to speak less lawyer-like and more popularly, they have a *jaw* together.

The case is soon decided, that is, dinner is dispatched. Then commences what, in view of most of us, is the chief business of the day. Before describing this, however, I would premise a little. The principal allurements and prime happiness of going to school, as it used to be conducted, was the opportunity it afforded for social amusement. Our rural abodes were scattered generally a half or a quarter of a mile apart, and the young could not see each other every day as conveniently as they can in a city or a village. The schooling season was therefore looked forward to as one long

series of holidays, or, as Mark Martin once said, as so many thanksgiving days, except the music, the sermon, and the dinner. Mark Martin, let me mention by the way, was the wit of the school. Some of his sayings, that made us laugh at the time, I shall hereafter put down. They may not affect the reader, however, as they did us, for the lack of his peculiar manner which set them off. "What a droll fellow Mark Martin is!" used to be the frequent expression.

Should I describe all the pastimes of the winter school, it would require more space than befits my plan. I shall therefore touch only on one or two of the different kinds of out-door frolic, such only as are peculiar to winter, and give a particular zest to the schooling season.

Of all the sportive exercises of the winter school, the most exhilarating, indeed intensely delightful, was sliding down hill, or coasting, as it is called. Not having the privilege of this, excepting in the snowy season, and then with frequent interruptions, it was far more highly prized. The

location of our school was uncommonly favorable for this diversion. Situated as we were on a hill, we could go down like arrows for the eighth of a mile on one side, and half that distance on the other. Almost every boy had his sled. Some of us got our names branded on the vehicle, and prided ourselves in the workmanship or the swiftness of it, as mariners do in that of a ship. We used to personify the dear little speeder with a she and a her, seaman-like also. Take it when a few days of severely cold and clear weather have permitted the road to be worn icy smooth, and the careering little coaster is the most enviable pleasure-rider that was ever eager to set out or sorry to stop. The very tugging up hill back again, is not without its pleasure. The change of posture is agreeable, and also the stir of limb and stretch of muscle for the short time required to return to the starting place. Then there is the looking forward to the glorious downhill again. In all the pleasures of human experience, there is nothing like coasting,

for the regular alternation of glowing anticipation and frame-thrilling enjoyment.

Had there been a mill-pond or any other sufficient expanse of water near the old school-house, I should probably now pen a paragraph on the delights of skating; but as there was not, and this was not therefore one of *our* school-sports, such a description would not properly belong to these annals.

But there is another pastime which comes only with the winter, and is enjoyed mostly at school, to which I will devote a few pages. It is the chivalrous pastime of snow-balling. Take, for instance, the earliest snow of winter, falling gently and stilly with its feathery flakes, of just the right moisture for easy manipulation. Or when the drifts soften in the mid-winter thaw, or begin to settle beneath the lengthened and sunny days of March, then is the season for the power and glory of a snow-ball fight. The whole school of the martial sex are out of a noon-time, from the veterans of a hundred battles down almost to the freshest recruits of the little front seat. Half against

half, unless a certain number agree to "take" all the rest. The oldest are opposed to the oldest in the hostile array, so that the little round, and perhaps hard, missile may not be out of proportion to the age, size, and toughness of the antagonist likely to be hit. The little boys, of course, against the little, with this advantage, that their discharges lose most of their force before reaching the object aimed at. When one is hit, he is not merely wounded; he is a dead man as to this battle. Here, no quarter is asked or given. The balls whistle, the men fall, until all are defunct but one or two individuals, who remain unkilld because there is no enemy left to hurl the fatal ball.

But our conflicts were not always make-believes, and conducted according to the formal rules of play: these sham-fights sometimes waxed into the very reality of war.

The school was about equally divided between the East and the West ends of the district. There had, from time immemorial, come down a rivalry between the two par-

ties in respect to physical activity and strength. At the close of the school in the afternoon, and at the parting of the scholars on their different ways toward home, there were almost always a few farewells in the form of a sudden trip-up, a dab of snow, or an icy-ball almost as tenderly soft and agreeable of contact as that mellow thing—a stone. These valedictories were as courteously reciprocated from the other side.

These slight skirmishes would sometimes grow into a general battle, when the arm was not careful to proportion the force just so as to touch and no more, as in a noon-day game.

One battle I recollect, which is worthy of being commemorated in a book, at least a book about boyhood, like this. It is as fresh before my mind's eye as if it were but yesterday. To swell somewhat into the pompous, glorious Waterloo could not be remembered by its surviving heroes with greater tenacity or distinctness.

It had gently but steadily snowed all one December night, and almost all the next

day. Owing to the weather, there were no girls excepting Captain Clark's two, and no very small boys, at school. The scholars had been unusually playful through the day, and had taken liberties which would not have been tolerated in the full school.

When we were dismissed at night, the snow had done falling, and the ammunition of just the right moisture lay in exhaustless abundance on the ground, all as level as a floor; for there had been no wind to distribute unequally the gifts of the impartial clouds. The first boy that sprang from the threshold caught up a quart of the spotless but viscid material, and whitewashed the face of the next one at the door, who happened to belong to the rival side. This was a signal for general action. As fast as the troops poured out, they rushed to the conflict. We had not the coolness deliberately to arrange ourselves in battle-order, line against line; but each aimed at each as he could, no matter whom, how, or where, provided that he belonged to the "other End." We did not round the snow into

shape, but hurled and dashed it in large masses, as we happened to snatch or scoop it up. As the combatants in gunpowder war are hidden from each other by clouds of their own raising, so also our warriors clouded themselves from sight. And there were other obstacles to vision besides the discharges in the air; for one or both the eyes of us all were glued up and sealed in darkness by the damp, sticky matter. The nasal and auditory cavities too were temporarily closed. And here and there a mouth, opening after a little breath, received the same snowy visitation.

At length, from putting snow into each other, we took to putting each other into the snow. Not by the formal and deliberate wrestle, but pell-mell, hurly-burly, as foot, hand, or head could find an advantage. The combatants were covered with the clinging element. It was as if their woollen habiliments had turned back to their original white. So completely were we all besmeared by the same material, that we could not tell friend from foe in the blind encoun-

ter. No matter for this; we were now crazed with fun; and we were ready to carry it to the utmost extent that time and space and snow would admit. Just opposite the school-house door, the hill descended very steeply from the road for about ten rods. The stone wall just here was quite low, and completely covered with snow even before this last fall. The two stoutest champions of the fray had been snowing it into each other like storm-spirits from the two opposite poles. At length, as if their snow-bolts were exhausted, they seized each other for the tug of muscle with muscle. They had unconsciously worked themselves to the precipitous brink. Another stout fellow caught a glimpse of their position, gave a rush and a push, and both Arctic and Antarctic went tumbling heels hindmost down the steep declivity, until they were stopped by the new-fallen snow in which they were completely buried; and one with his nose downward as if he had voluntarily dived into his own grave. This was a signal for a general push-off, and the

performer of the sudden exploit was the first to be gathered to his victims below. In five minutes, all were in the same predicament but one, who, not finding himself attacked, wiped the plaster from his eyes, and saw himself the lone hero of the field. He gave a victorious shout; then, not liking solitude for a playmate, he made a dauntless leap after the rest, who were now thickly rising from their snowy burial to life, action, and fun anew. Now the game is to put each other down, down, to the bottom of the hill. There is pulling, pushing, pitching, and whirling, every species of manual attack, except the pugilistic thump and knock-down. One long lubber has fallen exactly parallel with the bottom; and, before he can recover himself, two others are rolling him down like a senseless log, until the lumberers themselves are pitched head first over their timber by other hands still behind them. But at length we are all at the bottom of the hill, and indeed at the bottom of our strength. Which End, the East or the West, had the day, could not

be determined. In one sense it belonged to neither, for it was night. We now found ourselves in a plight not particularly comfortable to ourselves, nor likely to be very agreeable to the domestic guardians we must now meet. But the battle has been described, and that is enough : there is no glory in the suffering that succeeds.

CHAPTER XVII.

ARITHMETIC — COMMENCEMENT — PROGRESS —
LATE IMPROVEMENT IN THE ART OF TEACH-
ING IT.

AT the age of twelve, I commenced the study of Arithmetic, that chiefest of sciences in Yankee estimation. No man is willing that his son should be without skill in figures. And if he does not teach him his A B C at home, he will the art of counting, at least. Many a father deems it no hardship to instruct his child to enumerate even up to a hundred, when it would seem beyond his capacity, or certainly beyond the leisure of his rainy days and winter evenings, to sit down with the formality of a book, and teach him to read.

The entering on arithmetic was quite an era in my school-boy life. This was placing me decidedly among the great boys,

and within hailing distance of manhood. My feelings were consequently considerably elevated. A new Adams's Arithmetic of the latest edition was bought for my use. It was covered by the maternal hand with stout sheep-skin, in the economical expectation, that, after I had done with it, it might help still younger heads to the golden science. A quire of foolscap was made to take the form of a manuscript of the full length of the sheet, with a pasteboard cover, as more suitable to the dignity of such superior dimensions than flimsy brown paper.

I had also a bran new slate, for Ben used father's old one. It was set in a frame wrought by the aforesaid Ben, who prided himself on his knack at tools, considering that he had never served an apprenticeship at their use. There was no lack of timber in the fabrication. Mark Martin said that he could make a better frame with a jack-knife in his left hand, and keep his right in his pocket.

My first exercise was transcribing from

my Arithmetic to my manuscript. At the top of the first page I penned ARITHMETIC, in capitals an inch high, and so broad that this one word reached entirely across the page. At a due distance below, I wrote the word ADDITION in large, coarse hand, beginning with a lofty A, which seemed like the drawing of a mountain peak, towering above the level wilderness below. Then came *Rule*, in a little smaller hand, so that there was a regular gradation from the enormous capitals at the top, down to the fine running—no, hobbling hand in which I wrote off the rule.

Now slate and pencil and brain came into use. I met with no difficulty at first; Simple Addition was as easy as counting my fingers. But there was one thing I could not understand—that carrying of tens. It was absolutely necessary, I perceived, in order to get the right answer; yet it was a mystery which that arithmetical oracle, our schoolmaster, did not see fit to explain. It is possible that it was a mystery to him. Then came Subtraction.

The borrowing of ten was another unaccountable operation. The reason seemed to me then at the very bottom of the well of science; and there it remained for that winter, for no friendly bucket brought it up to my reach.

Every rule was transcribed to my manuscript, and each sum likewise as it stood proposed in the book, and also the whole process of figures by which the answer was found.

Each rule, moreover, was, or rather was to be, committed to memory, word for word, which to me was the most tedious and difficult job of the whole.

I advanced as far as Reduction this first winter, and a third through my manuscript, perhaps. The end of the Arithmetic seemed almost as far off in the future as that end of boyhood and under-age restraint, twenty-one.

The next winter I began at Addition again, to advance just through Interest. My third season I went over the same ground again, and, besides that, ciphered

to the very last sum in the Rule of Three. This was deemed quite an achievement for a lad only fourteen years old, according to the ideas prevailing at that period. Indeed I was now fitted to figure on and fill up the blank pages of manhood, to solve the hard question how much money I should be worth in the course of years. In plain language, whoever ciphered through the above-mentioned rule was supposed to have arithmetic enough for the common purposes of life. If one proceeded a few rules beyond this, he was considered quite smart. But if he went clear through—Miscellaneous Questions and all—he was thought to have an extraordinary taste and genius for figures. Now and then, a youth, after having been through Adams, entered upon old Pike, the arithmetical sage who “set the sums” for the preceding generation. Such were called great “arithmeticians.”

The fourth winter I advanced—but it is not important to the purpose of this work that I should record the minutiae of my progress in the science of numbers. Suffice

it to say, that I was not one of the "great at figures."

The female portion of the school, we may suppose, generally expected to obtain husbands to perform whatever arithmetical operations they might need, beyond the counting of fingers: so the science found no special favor with them. If pursued at all, it was neglected till the last year or two of their schooling. Most were provident enough to cipher as far as through the four simple rules; for although they had no idea of becoming old maids, they might possibly, however, be left widows. Had arithmetic been pursued at the summer school, those who intended to be summer teachers would probably have thought more of the science, and have proceeded further, even perhaps to the Rule of Three. But a schoolmistress would as soon have expected to teach the Arabic language as the numerical science. So, ignorance of it was no dishonor even to the first and best of the sex.

But what a change have the last few

years produced in respect to this subject ! Honor and gratitude be to Pestalozzi ; thanks be to our countrymen, Colburn, Emerson, and others, for making what was the hardest and driest of studies, one of the easiest and most interesting. They have at length tackled the intellectual team aright ; have put the carriage behind the carrier ; pshaw ! this over-refinement spoils the illustration—the cart behind the horse, where it ought always to have been. Formerly, memory, the mind's baggage-wagon—to change the word, but continue the figure—was loaded with rules, rules, words, words, to top-heaviness, and sent lumbering along ; while the understanding, which should have been the living and spirited mover of the vehicle, was kept ill-fed and lean, and put loosely behind, to push after as it could.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AUGUSTUS STARR, THE PRIVATEER WHO TURNED
PEDAGOGUE—HIS NEW CREW MUTINY, AND
PERFORM A SINGULAR EXPLOIT.

My tenth winter, our school was put under the instruction of a person named Augustus Starr. He was a native of a neighboring town, and had before been acquainted with the committee. He had taught school some years before, but, for the last few years, had been engaged in a business not particularly conducive to improvement in the art of teaching. He had been an inferior officer aboard a privateer in the late war, which terminated only the winter before. At the return of peace, he betook himself to land again; and, till something more suitable to his tastes and habits should offer, he concluded to resume

school-keeping, at least for one winter. He came to our town ; and, finding an old acquaintance seeking for a teacher, he offered himself, and was accepted. He was rather genteelly dressed, and gentlemanly in his manners.

Mr. Starr soon manifested that stern command, rather than mild persuasion, had been his method of preserving order, and was to be, still. This would have been put up with ; but he soon showed that he could deal in blows as well as words, and these not merely with the customary ferule, or supple and tingling stick, but with whatever came to hand. He knocked one lad down with his fist, hurled a stick of wood at another, which missed breaking his head because it struck the ceiling, making a dent which fearfully indicated what would have been the consequence had the skull been hit. The scholars were terrified, parents were alarmed, and some kept their younger children at home. There was an uproar in the district. A school-meeting was threat-

ened for the purpose of dismissing the captain, as he began to be called, in reference to the station he had lately filled, although it was not a captaincy. But he commanded the school-house crew: so, in speaking of him, they gave him a corresponding title. In consequence of these indications, our officer became less dangerous in his modes of punishment, and was permitted to continue still in command. But he was terribly severe, nevertheless; and in his words of menace, he manifested no particular respect for that one of the ten commandments which forbids profanity. But he took pains with his pupils, and they made considerable progress according to the prevailing notions of education.

Toward the close of the school, however, Starr's fractious temper, his cuffs, thumps, and cudgelings, waxed dangerous again. There were signs of mutiny among the large scholars, and there were provocations and loud talk among parents. The man of violence, even at this late period, would

have been dismissed by the authority of the district, had not a sudden and less formal ejection overtaken him.

The captain had been outrageously severe, and even cruel, to some of the smaller boys. The older brothers of the sufferers, with others of the back seat, declared among themselves, that they would put him by force out of the school-house, if any thing of the like should happen again. The very afternoon succeeding this resolution, an opportunity offered to put it to the test. John Howe, for some trifling misdemeanor, received a cut with the edge of the ruler on his head, which drew blood. The dripping wound and the scream of the boy were a signal for action, as if a murderer were at his fell deed before their eyes. Thomas Howe, one of the oldest in the school and the brother of the abused, and Mark Martin, were at the side of our privateer in an instant. Two others followed. His ruler was wrested from his hand, and he was seized by his legs and shoulders,

before he could scarcely think into what hands he had fallen. He was carried, kicking and swearing, out of doors. But this was not the end of his headlong and horizontal career. "To the side-hill, to the side-hill," cried Mark, who had him by the head. Now it so happened that the hill-side opposite the school-house door was crusted, and as smooth and slippery as pure ice, from a recent rain. To this pitch, then, he was borne, and in all the haste that his violent struggles would permit. Over he was thrust, as if he were a log; and down he went, giving one of his bearers a kick as he was shoved from their hands, which action of the foot sent him more swiftly on his way from the rebound. There was no bush or stone to catch by in his descent, and he clawed the unyielding crust with his nails, for the want of any thing more prominent on which to lay hold. Down, down he went. Oh for a pile of stones or a thicket of thorns to cling to, even at the expense of torn apparel or

scratched fingers! Down, down he went, until he fairly came to the climax, or rather anti-climax, of his pedagogical career.—Mark Martin, who retained singular self-possession, cried out, “There goes a shooting *star*.”

When our master had come to a “period or full stop,” to quote from the spelling-book, he lay a moment as if he had left his breath behind him, or as if querying whether he should consider himself alive or not; or perhaps whether it were really his own honorable self who had been voyaging in this unseamanlike fashion, or somebody else. Perhaps he was at a loss for the points of compass, as is often the case in tumbles and topsy-turvies. He at length arose and stood upright, facing the ship of literature which he had lately commanded; and his mutinous crew, great and small, male and female, now lining the side of the road next to the declivity, from which most of them had witnessed his expedition. The movement had been so sudden, and the

ejection so unanticipated by the school in general, that they were stupefied with amazement. And the bold performers of the exploit were almost as much amazed as the rest, excepting Mark, who still retained coolness enough for his joke. "What think of the *coasting* trade, captain?" shouted Mark; "is it as profitable as privateering?" Our coaster made no reply, but turned in pursuit of a convenient footing to get up into the road, and to the school-house again. While he was at a distance approaching his late station of command, Mark Martin stepped forward to hold a parley with him. "We have a word to say to you, sir, before you come much farther. If you will come back peaceably, you may come; but, as sure as you meddle with any of us, we will make you acquainted with the *heft* and the hardness of our fists, and of stones and clubs too, if we must. The ship is no longer yours; so look out, for we are our own men now." Starr replied, "I do not wish to

have any thing more to do with the school; but there is another law besides club law, and that you have got to take." But when he came up and saw John Howe's face stained with blood, and his head bound up as if it had received the stroke of a cutlass, he began to look rather blank. Our spokesman reminded him of what he had done, and inquired "which was the worst, a ride and a slide, or a gashed head?" "I rather guess that you are the one to look out for the law," said Thomas Howe, with a threatening tone and look. Whether this hint had effect, I know not, but he never commenced a prosecution. He gathered up his goods and chattels, and left the school-house. The scholars gathered up their implements of learning, and left likewise, after the boys had taken one more glorious slide down hill.

There were both gladness and regret in that dispersion;—gladness that they had no more broken heads, shattered hands, and skinned backs to fear; and regret that the

season of schooling, and of social and delightful play, had been cut short by a week.

The news reached most of the district in the course of the next day, that our "man of war," as he was sometimes called, had sailed out of port the night before.

CHAPTER XIX.

ELEVENTH WINTER—MR. SILVERSON, OUR FIRST
TEACHER FROM COLLEGE—HIS BLUNDER AT
MEETING ON THE SABBATH—HIS CHARACTER
AS A SCHOOLMASTER.

THIS winter, Major Allen was the committee; and of course, every body expected a dear master, if not a good one; he had always expressed himself so decidedly against "your cheap trash." They were not disappointed. They had a dear master, high priced and not much worth. Major Allen sent to college for an instructor, as a young gentleman from such an institution must of course be qualified as to learning, and would give a higher tone to the school. He had good reason for the expectation, as a gentleman from the same institution had taught the two preceding win-

ters in another town where Major Allen was intimately acquainted, and gave the highest satisfaction. But he was a very different sort of person from Mr. Frederic Silversen, of the city of ———, member of the junior class in ——— College. This young gentleman did not teach eight weeks, at eighteen dollars per month, for the sake of the trifling sum to pay his college bills, and help him to rub a little more easily through. He kept for fun, as he told his fellow bucks; that is, to see the fashions of country life, to “cut capers” among folks whose opinion he didn’t care for, and to bring back something to laugh about all the next term. The money, too, was a consideration, as it would pay a bill or two which he preferred that his very indulgent father should not know of.

Major Allen had written to some of the college authorities for an instructor, not doubting that he should obtain one of proved worth, or at least one who had been acquainted with country schools in his boyhood, and would undertake with such

motives as would ensure a faithful discharge of his duties. But a tutor, an intimate acquaintance of Silverson's family, was requested to aid the self-rusticating son to a school; so by this means this city beau and college buck was sent to preside over our district seminary of letters.

Well, Mr. Silverson arrived on Saturday evening at Capt. Clark's. Sunday he went to meeting. He was, indeed, a very genteel-looking personage, and caused quite a sensation among the young people in our meeting-house, especially those of our district. He was tall, but rather slender, with a delicate skin, and a cheek whose roses had not been uprooted from their native bed by what, in college, is called hard digging. His hair was cut and combed in the newest fashion, as was supposed, being arranged very differently from that of our young men. Then he wore a cloak of many-colored plaid, in which flaming red, however, was predominant. A plaid cloak—this was a new thing in our obscure town at that period, and struck us with admiration. We

had seen nothing but surtouts and great coats from our fathers' sheep and our mothers' looms. His cravat was tied behind; this was another novelty. We had never dreamed but that the knot should be made, and the ends should dangle beneath the chin. Then his bosom flourished with a ruffle, and glistened with a breast-pin, such as were seldom seen so far among the hills.

Capt. Clark unconsciously assumed a stateliness of gait unusual to him, as he led the way up the centre aisle, introduced the gentleman into his pew, and gave him his own seat, that is, next the aisle, and the most respectable in the pew. The young gentleman, not having been accustomed to such deference in public, was a little confused; and when he heard "That is the new master" whispered very distinctly by some one near, and, on looking up, saw himself the centre of an all-surrounding stare, he was smitten with a fit of bashfulness, such as he had never felt before. So he quiddled with his fingers, sucked and

bit his lips, as a relief to his feelings, the same as those rustic starers would have done at a splendid party in his mother's drawing-rooms. During singing, he was intent on the hymn-book, in the prayer he bent over the pew-side, and during the sermon looked straight at the preacher—a church-like deportment which he had never, perhaps, manifested before, and probably may never have since. He was certainly not so severely decorous in that meeting-house again. After the forenoon services, he committed a most egregious blunder, by which his bashfulness was swallowed up in shame. It was the custom in country towns then for all who sat upon the centre or broad aisle, as it was called, to remain in their pews till the reverend man of the pulpit had passed along by. Our city-bred gentleman was not apprized of this etiquette; for it did not prevail in the metropolis. Well, as soon as the last *amen* was pronounced, Capt. Clark politely handed him his hat; and, being next to the pew door, he supposed he must make his egress first.

He stepped out, and had gone several feet down the aisle, when he observed old and young standing in their pews on both sides, in front of his advance, staring at him as if surprised, and some of them with an incipient laugh. He turned his head, and gave a glance back; and, behold, he was alone in the long avenue, with a double line of eyes aimed at him from behind as well as before. All seemed waiting for the minister, who by this time had just reached the foot of the pulpit stairs. He was confounded with a consciousness of his mistake. Should he keep on or return to the pew, was a momentary question. It was a dilemma worse than any in logic: it was a severe "screw." * But finally, back he was going, when, behold, Capt. Clark's pew was blocked up by the out-poured and out-pouring throng of people, with the minister at their head. This was a complete "dead

* When a scholar gets considerably puzzled in recitation, he is said in college to take a *screw*. When he is so ignorant of his lesson as not to be able to recite at all, he takes a *dead set*.

set," "above all Greek, above all Roman fame." What should he do now? He wheeled again, dropped his head, put his left hand to his face, and went crouching down the aisle, and out of the door, like a boy going out with the nose-bleed.

On the ensuing morning, our collegian commenced school. He had never taught, and had never resided in the country before. He had acquired a knowledge of the daily routine usually pursued in school, from a class-mate who had some experience in the vocation; so he began things right end foremost, and finished at the other extremity in due order; but they were most clumsily handled all the way through. His first fault was exceeding indolence. He had escaped beyond the call of the morning prayer-bell, that had roused him at dawn, and he seemed resolved to replenish his nature with sleep. He was generally awakened to the consciousness of being a school-master by the ringing shouts of his waiting pupils. Then a country breakfast was too delicious a contrast to college commons to

be cut short. Thus that point of duration called nine o'clock, and school-time, often approximated exceedingly near to ten that winter.

Mr. Silverson did not visit in the several families of the district, as most of his predecessors had done. He would have been pleased to visit at every house, for he was socially inclined; and what was more, he desired to pick up "food for fun" when he should return to college. But the people did not think themselves "smart" enough to entertain a collegian, and the son of the rich Mr. —, of the city of —, besides. Or, perhaps, what is coming nearer the precise truth, his habits and pursuits were so different from theirs, that they did not know exactly how to get at him, and in what manner to attempt to entertain him; and he, on the other hand, did not know how to fall into the train of their associations in his conversation, so as to make them feel at ease, and, as it were, at home with him. Another circumstance ought to be mentioned, perhaps. The people very soon

contracted a growing prejudice against our schoolmaster, on account of his very evident unfitness for his present vocation, and especially his unpardonable indolence and neglect of duty.

So Mr. Silverson was not invited out, excepting by Major Allen, who engaged him, and by two or three others who chanced to come in contact with him, and to find him more sociably disposed, and a less formidable personage, than they anticipated. He spent most of his evenings, therefore, at his boarding place, with one volume in his hand, generally that of a novel, and another volume issuing from his mouth,—that of smoke; and, as his chief object was just to kill time, he was not careful that the former should not be as fummy, as baseless, and as unprofitable as the latter. As for the Greek, Latin, and mathematics, to which he should have devoted some portion of his time, according to the college regulations he never looked at them till his return. Then he just glanced them over, and trust-

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ed luck when he was examined for two weeks' study, as he had done a hundred times before at his daily recitation.

What our young college buck carried back to laugh about all the next term, I do not know, unless it was his own dear self, for being so foolish as to undertake a business for which he was so utterly unfit, and from which he derived so little pleasure, compared with his anticipations.

Before closing this chapter, I would caution the reader not to take the subject of it as a specimen of all heirs of city opulence who are, or have been, members of college, and have perhaps attempted country school-keeping. I have known many of very different stamp. One gentleman in particular rises to recollection, the son of very affluent but also very judicious parents. While a student in college, he took a district school for the winter vacation. His chief purpose was to add to his stores of valuable knowledge, and prepare himself for wider usefulness. He would not study the things of

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Ancient Greece and Rome, and of Modern Europe, and neglect the customs and manners, and the habits of thinking and feeling, characteristic of his own nation. But his own nation were substantially the farmers and mechanics scattered on the hills and along the valleys of the country. To the country he must therefore go, and into the midst of their very domestic circles to study them. But he did not seek this advantage to the disadvantage of the school committed to his charge. He endeavored to make himself acquainted with his duties as much as he conveniently could beforehand, and then he devoted himself assiduously to them. In the instruction of the young he derived a benefit additional to his principal object in taking the school. He learned the art of communication,—of adapting himself to minds differing in capacity and cultivation from his own. In this way he acquired a tact in addressing the young and the less intelligent among the grown-up, which is now not only a gratification, but of great

use. He became, moreover, interested in the great subject of education more than he otherwise would,—the education of the great mass of the people, so that now he is one of the most ardent and efficient agents in the patriotic and benevolent work.

This gentleman was exceedingly liked as a teacher, and was very popular as a visitor in the families of the district. “He seems so like one of *us*. He hasn’t an atom of *pride*.” Such were the frequent remarks. And this was what they did not expect of a collegian, city born, and the son of one of the richest men in the state.

He has often remarked since, that these two months spent in a district school and country neighborhood were of as much value to him as any two months of his life; indeed, of more value than any single year of his life. His books enriched and disciplined his mind, perhaps; but this mingling with the middle rank, of which the great majority is composed, more thoroughly Americanized his mind. By his resi-

dence among the country people, he learned to do what should be done by every citizen of the United States, however distinguished by birth, wealth, talents or education : he learned to identify himself with the great body of the nation, to consider himself as "one of the people."

CHAPTER XX.

A COLLEGE MASTER AGAIN—HIS CHARACTER IN SCHOOL AND OUT—OUR FIRST ATTEMPTS AT COMPOSITION—BRIEF SKETCH OF ANOTHER TEACHER.

MY twelfth winter has arrived. It was thought best to try a teacher from college again, as the committee had been assured that there were teachers to be found there of the first order, and well worth the high price they demanded for their services. A Mr. Ellis was engaged at twenty dollars per month, from the same institution mentioned before. Particular pains were taken to ascertain the college character, and the school-keeping experience of the gentleman, before his engagement, and they were such as to warrant the highest expectations.

The instructor was to board round in the several families of the district, who gave the board in order to lengthen the school to the usual term. It happened that he was to be at our house the first week. On Saturday Mr. Ellis arrived. It was a great event to us children for the master to stop at our house, and one from college too. We were smitten with bashfulness, and stiffened into an awkwardness unusual with us, even among strangers. But this did not last long. Our guest put us all at ease very soon. He seemed just like one of us, or like some unpuffed-up uncle from genteeler life, who had dropped in upon us for a night, with cordial heart, chatty tongue, and merry laugh. He seemed perfectly acquainted with our prevailing thoughts and feelings, and let his conversation slide into the current they flowed in, as easily as if he had never been nearer college than we ourselves. With my father he talked about the price of produce, the various processes and improvements in agriculture, and the politics of the day, and such other topics as

would be likely to interest a farmer so far in the country. And those topics, indeed, were not a few. Some students would have sat in dignified or rather dumpish silence, and have gone to bed by mid-evening, simply because those who sat with them could not discourse on those deep things of science, and lofty matters of literature, which were particularly interesting to themselves. With my mother Mr. Ellis talked at first about her children. He patted a little brother on his cheek, took a sister on his knee, and inquired the baby's name. Then he drew forth a housewifely strain concerning various matters in country domestic life. Of me he inquired respecting my studies at school years past; and even condescended to speak of his own boyhood and youth, and of the sports as well as the duties of school. The fact is, that Mr. Ellis had always lived in the country till three years past; his mind was full of rural remembrances; and he knew just how to take us to be agreeable himself, and to elicit entertainment in return.

Mr. Ellis showed himself at home in school, as well as at the domestic fireside. He was perfectly familiar with his duties, as custom had prescribed them, but he did not abide altogether by the old usages. He spent much time in explaining those rules in arithmetic and grammar, and those passages in the spelling-book, with which we had hitherto lumbered our memories.

This teacher introduced a new exercise into our school, that we had never thought of before as being possible to ourselves. It was composition. We hardly knew what to make of it. To write—to put sentence after sentence like a newspaper, a book, or a sermon—oh! we could not do this; we could not think of such a thing; indeed, it was an impossibility. But we must try, at any rate. The subject given out for this novel use of thought and pen was friendship. Friendship—what had we to say on this subject? We could feel on it, perhaps, especially those of us who had read a novel or two, and had dreamed of eternal friend-

ship. But we had not a single idea. Friendship! oh! it is a delightful thing! This, or something similar, was about all we poor creatures could think of. What a spectacle of wretchedness did we present! A stranger would have supposed us all smitten with the toothache, by the agony expressed in the face. One poor girl put her head down into a corner, and cried till the master excused her. And, finally, finding that neither smiles nor frowns would put ideas into our heads, he let us go for that week.

In about a fortnight, to our horror, the exercise was proposed again. But it was only to write a letter. Any one could do as much as this, the master said; for almost every one had occasion to do it in the course of life. Indeed, we thought, on the whole, that we *could* write a letter, so at it we went with considerable alacrity. But our attempts at the epistolary were nothing like those spirited, and even witty, products of thought which used ever to be flying from seat to seat in the shape of billets. The

sprightly fancy and the gushing heart seemed to have been chilled and deadened by the reflection that a letter *must* be written, and the master *must* see it. These epistolary compositions generally began, continued, and closed all in the same way, as if all had got the same recipe from their grandmothers for letter writing. They mostly commenced in this manner: "Dear friend, I take my pen in hand to inform you that I am well, and hope you are enjoying the same blessing." Then there would be added, perhaps, "We have a very good schoolmaster; have you a good one? How long has your school got to keep? We have had a terrible stormy time on't?" &c. Mark Martin addressed the master in his epistle. What its contents were I could not find out; but I saw Mr. Ellis read it. At first he looked grave, as at the assurance of the youth; then a little severe, as if his dignity was outraged; but in a moment he smiled, and finally he almost burst out with laughter at some closing witticism.

Mark's was the only composition that had any nature and soul in it. He wrote what he thought, instead of thinking what to write, like the rest of us, who, in the effort, thought just nothing at all; for we wrote words which we had seen written a hundred times before.

Mr. Ellis succeeded in delivering us from our stale and flat formalities before he had done. He gave us no more such abstract and lack-idea subjects as friendship. He learned better how to accommodate the theme to the youthful mind. We were set to describe what we had seen with our eyes, heard with our ears, and what had particularly interested our feelings at one time and another. One boy described the process of cider-making. Another gave an account of a squirrel hunt; another of a great husking; each of which had been witnessed the autumn before. The girls described certain domestic operations. One, I remember, gave quite an amusing account of the coming and going, and final

tarrying, of her mother's soap. Another penned a sprightly dialogue, supposed to have taken place between two sisters on the question, which should go a visiting with mother, and which should stay at home and "take care of the things."

The second winter (for he taught two), Mr. Ellis occasionally proposed more abstract subjects, and such as required more thinking and reasoning, but still such as were likely to be interesting, and on which he knew his scholars to possess at least a few ideas.

I need not say how popular Mr. Ellis was in the district. He was decidedly the best schoolmaster I ever went to, and he was the last.

I have given him a place here, not because he is to be classed with his predecessors who taught the district school as it *was*, but because he closed the series of my own instructors there, and was the last, moreover, who occupied the old school-house. He commenced a new era in our district.

Before closing, I must give one necessary hint. Let it not be inferred from this narrative of my own particular experience, that the best teachers of district schools are to be found in college only. The very next winter, the school was blessed with an instructor even superior to Mr. Ellis, although he was not a collegian. Mr. Henry, however, had well disciplined and informed his mind, and was, moreover, an experienced teacher. I was not one of his pupils; but I was in the neighborhood, and knew of his methods, his faithfulness, and success. His tall, spare, stooping and dyspeptic form is now distinctly before my mind's eye. I see him wearied with incessant exertion, taking his way homeward at the close of the afternoon school. His pockets are filled with compositions, to be looked over in private. There are school papers in his hat too. A large bundle of writing-books is under his arm. Through the long evening, and in the little leisure of the morning, I see him still hard at work

for the good of his pupils. Perhaps he is surrounded by a circle of the larger scholars, whom he has invited to spend the evening with him, to receive a more thorough explanation of some branch or item of study than there was time for in school. But stop—Mr. Henry did not keep the district school as it *was*—why, then, am I describing him ?

CHAPTER XXI.

THE EXAMINATION AT THE CLOSING OF THE
SCHOOL.

THE district school as it was generally closed, in the winter, with what was called an "examination." This was usually attended by the minister of the town, the committee who engaged the teacher, and such of the parents as chose to come in. Very few, however, were sufficiently interested in the improvement of their children, to spend three uncomfortable hours in the hot and crowded school-room, listening to the same dull round of words, year after year. If the school had been under the care of a good instructor, all was well of course; if a poor one, it was too late to help it. Or, perhaps, they thought they could not afford the time on a fair afternoon; and, if the weather was stormy, it

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was rather more agreeable to stay at home; besides, "Nobody else will be there, and why should I go?" Whether such were the reflections of parents or not, scarcely more than half of them, at most, ever attended the examination. I do not recollect that the summer school was examined at all. I know not the reason of this omission, unless it was that such had been the custom from time immemorial.

We shall suppose it to be the last day of the winter school. The scholars have on their better clothes, if their parents are somewhat particular, or if the every-day dress "looks quite too bad." The young ladies, especially, wear the next best gown, and a more cleanly and tastefully worked neckerchief. Their hair displays more abundant curls and a more elaborate adjustment.

It is noon. The school-room is undergoing the operation of being swept as clean as a worn-out broom in the hands of one girl, and hemlock twigs in the hands of others, will permit. Whew—what a dust!

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Alas for Mary's cape, so snow-white and smooth in the morning! Hannah's curls, which lay so close to each other, and so pat and still on her temples, have got loose by the exercise, and have stretched themselves into the figure of half-straightened corkscrews, nearly unfit for service. The spirit of the house-wife dispossesses the bland and smiling spirit of the school-girl. The masculine candidates for matrimony can now give a shrewd guess who are endued with an innate propensity to scold; who will be Xantippes to their husbands, should they ever get their Cupid's nests made up again so as to catch them. "Be still, Sam, bringing in snow," screams Mary. "Get away boys, off out doors, or I'll sweep you into the fire," snaps out Hannah, as she brushes the urchins' legs with her hemlock. "There, take that," screeches Margaret, as she gives a provoking lubber a knock with the broom handle; "there, take that, and keep your wet, dirty feet down off the seats."

The sweeping and scolding are at length

done. The girls are now brushing their clothes, by flapping handkerchiefs over themselves and each other. The dust is subsiding; one can almost breathe again. The master has come, all so prim, with his best coat and a clean cravat; and, may be, a collar is stiff and high above it. His hair is combed in its genteelest curvatures. He has returned earlier than usual, and the boys are cut short in their play,—the glorious fun of the last noon-time. But they must all come in. But what shall the visitors sit on? “Go up to Captain Clark’s, and borrow some chairs,” says the master. Half a dozen boys are off in a moment, and next, more than half a dozen chairs are sailing, swinging, and clattering through the air, and set in a row round the spelling-floor.

The school are at length all seated at their books, in palpitating expectation. The master makes a speech on the importance of speaking up, “loud and distinct,” and of refraining from whispering, and all other things well known to be forbidden. The writing-books and ciphering manuscripts

are gathered and piled on the desk, or the bench near it. "Where is your manuscript, Margaret?" "I carried it home last night." "Carried it home!—what's that for?" "Cause I was ashamed on't—I haven't got half so far in 'rethmetic as the rest of the girls who cipher, I've had to stay at home so much."

A heavy step is heard in the entry. All is hushed within. They do nothing but breathe. The door opens—it is nobody but one of the largest boys who went home at noon. There are sleigh-bells approaching,—hark, do they stop? yes, up in Captain Clark's shed. Now there is another tread, then a distinct and confident rap. The master opens the door, and the minister salutes him, and, advancing, receives the simultaneous bows and courtesies of the awed ranks in front. He is seated in the most conspicuous and honorable place, perhaps in the magisterial desk. Then some of the neighbors scatter in, and receive the same homage, though it is proffered with a more careless action and aspect.

Now commences the examination. First, the younger classes read and spell. Observe that little fellow, as he steps from his seat to take his place on the floor. It is his day of public triumph, for he is at the head; he has been there the most times, and a nine-pence swings by a flaxen string from his neck. His skin wants letting out, it will hardly hold the important young gentleman. His mother told him this morning, when he left home, "to speak up like a minister," and his shrill oratory is almost at the very pinnacle of utterance.

The third class have read. They are now spelling. They are famous orthographers; the mightiest words of the spelling columns do not intimidate them. Then come the numbers, the abbreviations, and the punctuation. Some of the little throats are almost choked by the hurried ejection of big words and stringy sentences.

The master has gone through with the several accomplishments of the class. They are about to take their seats. "Please to let them stand a few moments longer, I

should like to put out a few words to them, myself," says the minister. Now look out. 'They expect words as long as their finger, from the widest columns of the spelling-book, or perhaps such as are found only in the dictionary. "Spell *wrist*," says he to the little sweller at the head. "O, what an easy word!" r-i-s-t, wrist. It is not right. 'The next, the next—they all try, or rather do not attempt the word; for if r-i-s-t does not spell *wrist*, they cannot conceive what does. "Spell *gown*, Anna." G-o-u-n-d. "O no, it is *gown*, not *gound*. 'The next try." None of them can spell this. He then puts out *penknife*, which is spelt without the k, and then *andiron*, which his honor at the head rattles off in this way, "h-a-n-d hand, i-u-r-n hand-i-urn."

'The poor little things are confused as well as discomfited. They hardly know what it means. The teacher is disconcerted and mortified. It dawns on him, that, while he has been following the order of the book, and priding himself that so young scholars can spell such monstrous great

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words,—words which perhaps they will never use, they cannot spell the names of the most familiar objects. 'The minister has taught him a lesson.

The writing-books are now examined. The mighty pile is lifted from the desk, and scattered along through the hands of the visitors. Some are commended for the neatness with which they have kept their manuscripts; some, for improvement in writing; of some, probably of the majority, is said nothing at all.

“ Whew ! ” softly breathed the minister, as he opened a writing-book, some of whose pages were a complete ink-souse. He looked on the outside, and Simon Patch was the name that lay sprawling in the dirt which adhered to the newspaper cover. Simon spied his book in the reverend gentleman's hands, and noticed his queer stare at it. The minister looked up; Simon shrunk and looked down, for he felt that his eye was about to seek him. He gazed intensely in the book before him without seeing a word, at the same time earnestly sucking the

pointed lapel of his Sunday coat. But Simon escaped without any audible rebuke.

Now comes the arithmetical examination; that is, the proficients in this branch are required to say the rules. Alas me! I had no reputation at all in this science. I could not repeat more than half the rules I had been over, nor more than the half of that half in the words of the book, as others could. What shame and confusion of face were mine on the last day, when we came to be questioned in Arithmetic! But when Mr. Ellis had his examination, I looked up a little, and felt that I was not so utterly incompetent as my previous teachers, together with myself, had supposed.

Then came the display in Grammar, our knowledge of which is especially manifested in parsing. A piece is selected which we have parsed in the course of the school, and on which we are again drilled so as to become as familiar with the parts of speech, and the governments and agreements of which, as we are with the buttons and but-

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ton-holes of our jackets. We appear, of course, amazingly expert.

We exhibited our talent at reading likewise, in passages selected for the occasion, and conned over, and read over, until the dullest might call all the words right, and the most careless mind all the "stops and marks."

But this examination was a stupid piece of business to me, as is evident enough from this stupid account of it. The expectation and preparation were somewhat exhilarating, as I trust has been perceived; but, as soon as the anticipated scene had commenced, it grew dull, and still more dull, just like this chapter.

But let us finish this examination, now we are about it. Suppose it finished then. The minister remarks to the teacher, "Your school appears very well, in general, sir;" then he makes a speech, then a prayer, and his business is done. So is that of schoolmaster and school. "You are dismissed" is uttered for the last time this season. It is almost dark, and but little

time left for a last trip-up, snow-ball, or slide down hill. The little boys and girls, with their books and dinner baskets, ride home with their parents, if they happen to be there. The larger ones have some last words and laughs, together, and then they leave the Old School-house till December comes round again.

## CHAPTER XXII.

THE OLD SCHOOL-HOUSE AGAIN—ITS APPEARANCE  
THE LAST WINTER—WHY SO LONG OCCUPIED  
—A NEW ONE AT LAST.

My first chapter was about the Old School-house : so shall be my last. The declining condition in which we first found it, has waxed into exceeding infirmity by the changes of thirteen years. After the summer school succeeding my thirteenth winter of district education, it was sold and carried piece-meal away, ceasing for ever from the form and name of school-house.

I would have my readers see how the long-used and hard-used fabric appeared, and how near to dissolution it came before the district could agree to accommodate their children with a new one.

We will now suppose it is my last winter at our school. Here we are inside, let us look around a little.

The long writing-benches arrest our attention as forcibly as any thing in sight. They were originally of substantial plank, an inch and a half thick. And it is well that they were thus massive. No board of ordinary measure would have stood the hackings and hewings, the scrapings and borings, which have been inflicted on those sturdy plank. In the first place, the edge next the scholar is notched from end to end, presenting an appearance something like a broken-toothed mill-saw. Upon the upper surface, there has been carved, or pictured with ink, the likeness of all things in the heavens and on earth ever beheld by a country school-boy; and sundry guesses at things he never did see. Fifty years has this poor timber been subjected to the knives of idlers, and almost the fourth of fifty I have hacked on it myself; and by this last winter their width has become diminished

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nearly one-half. There are, moreover, innumerable writings on the benches and ceilings. On the boys' side were scribbled the names of the Hannahs, the Marys, and the Harriets, toward whom young hearts were beginning to soften in the first gentle meltings of love. One would suppose that a certain Harriet A. was the most distinguished belle the district has ever produced, from the frequency of her name on bench and wall.

The cracked and patched and puttied windows are now still more diversified by here and there a square of board instead of glass.

The master's desk is in pretty good order. The first one was knocked over in a noon-time scuffle, and so completely shattered as to render a new one necessary. This has stood about ten years.

As to the floor, had it been some winters, we could not have seen it without considerable scraping away of dust and various kinds of litter; for a broom was not always

provided, and boys would not wallow in the snow after hemlock, and sweeping could not so well be done with a stick. This winter, however, Mr. Ellis takes care that the floor shall be visible the greater part of the time. It is rough with sundry patches of board nailed over chinks and knot-holes made by the wear and tear of years.

Now we will look at the fire-place. One end of the hearth has sunk an inch and a half below the floor. There are crevices between some of the tiles, into which coals of fire sometimes drop and make the boys spring for snow. The andirons have each lost a fore-foot, and the office of the important member is supplied by bricks which had been dislodged from the chimney-top. The fire-shovel has acquired by accident or age a venerable stoop. The tongs can no longer be called a pair, for the lack of one of the fellow-limbs. The bar of iron running from jamb to jamb in front,—how it is bent and sinking in the middle, by the pressure of the sagging fabric above! Indeed

the whole chimney is quite ruinous. The bricks are loose here and there in the vicinity of the fire-place; and the chimney-top has lost so much of its cement that every high wind dashes off a brick, rolling and sliding on the roof, and then tumbling to the ground, to the danger of cracking whatever heedless skull may happen in the way.

The window-shutters, after having shattered the glass by the slams of many years, have broken their own backs at length. Some have fallen to the ground, and are going the way of all things perishable. Others hang by a single hinge, which is likely to give way at the next high gale, and consign the dangling shutter to the company of its fellows below.

The clap-boards are here and there loose, and dropping one by one from their fastenings. One of these thin and narrow appendages, sticking by a nail at one end, and loose and slivered at the other sends forth the most ear-rending music to the skillful touches of the North-west. In allusion to

the soft-toned instrument of *Æolus*, it may be termed the Borean harp. Indeed, so many are the avenues by which the wind passes in and out, and so various are the notes, according as the rushing air vibrates a splinter, makes the window clatter, whistles through a knot-hole, and rumbles like big base down the chimney, that the edifice may be imagined uproarious winter's Panharmonicon,\* played upon in turn by all the winds.

Such is the condition of the Old School-house, supposing it to be just before we leave it forever, at the close of my thirteenth and last winter at our district school. It has been resorted to summer after summer, and winter after winter, although the observation of parents and the sensations of children have long given evidence that it ought to be abandoned.

At every meeting on school affairs that has been held for several years, the question

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\* The Panharmonicon is a large instrument in which the peculiar tones of several smaller instruments are combined.

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of a new school-house has been discussed. All agree on the urgent need of one, and all are willing to contribute their portion of the wherewith; but when they attempt to decide on its location, then their harmonious action is at an end. All know that this high bleak hill, the coldest spot within a mile, is not the place; it would be stupid folly to put it here. At the foot of the hill on either side, is as snug and pleasant a spot as need be. But the East-enders will not permit its location on the opposite side, and the West-enders are as obstinate on their part. Each division declares that it will secede and form a separate district should it be carried further off, although in this case they must put up with much cheaper teachers, or much less schooling, or submit to twice the taxes.

Thus they have tossed the ball of discussion, and sometimes hurled that of contention, back and forth, year after year, to just about as much profit as their children have flung snow-balls in play, or chips and cakes

of ice when provoked. At length Time, the final decider of all things material, wearied with their jars, is likely to end them by tumbling the old ruin about their ears.

Months have passed ; it is near winter again. There is great rejoicing among the children, satisfaction among the parents, harmony between the two Ends. A new school-house has been erected at last,—indeed it has. A door of reconciliation and mutual adjustment was opened in the following manner.

That powerful-to-do, but tardy personage, the Public, began to be weary of ascending and descending Captain Clark's hill. He began to calculate the value of time and horse-flesh. One day it occurred to him that it would be as "cheap, and indeed much cheaper," to go round this hill at the bottom than to go round it over the top ; for it is just as far from side to side of a ball in one direction as in another, and this was a case somewhat similar. He perceived

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that there would be no more lost in the long run by the expense of carrying the road an eighth of a mile to the south, and all on level ground, than there would be by still wasting the breath of horse and the patience of man in panting up and tottering down this monstrous hill. It seemed as if he had been blind for years, not to have conceived of the improvement before. No time was to be lost now. He lifted up his many-tongued voice, and put forth his many-handed strength; and, in the process of a few months, a road was constructed, curving round the south side of the aforesaid hill, which, after all, proved to be but a few rods longer from point to point than the other.

The district were no longer at variance about the long-needed edifice. The aforementioned improvement had scarcely been decided on, before every one perceived how the matter might be settled. A school-meeting was soon called, and it was unanimously agreed to erect a new school-house

on the new road, almost exactly opposite the old spot, and as equidistant from the two Ends, it was believed, as the equator is from the poles.

Here Mr. Henry *taught* the District School somewhat as it should be; and it has never since been *kept* as it was.



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